

tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'
community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Spring 2015

Tenant
approved

ie awards
2014

Gold award for
Council of the Year



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Introduction from Councillor Bert Bremner

Welcome to the spring edition of *TLC* magazine

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

I am delighted to see such a wide range of opportunities written about throughout this latest edition of *TLC* magazine, designed to give tenants a greater voice in the services they receive.

The estate audit programme has led to a number of improvement projects being implemented, which have had a really positive impact on local communities.

If you have ideas for ways to improve where you live then please do get in touch with us. Your neighbourhood housing officer will be happy to hold an event in your local area to discuss your ideas.

I would also like to encourage you to sign up to the Talkback

panel and share your views on council services through these brief telephone questionnaires, which cover a range of topics.

I look forward to finding out how you think we are performing when the results of the most recent STAR questionnaire are revealed. We hope the changes to our repairs reporting systems have helped enhance your customer experience and we're keen to know of other areas where you think we could do better.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to the tenants involved in all of our panels for their tireless efforts in making things better for all residents. There are real benefits to be gained from the free tenant training currently on offer,

regardless of whether or not you want to be directly involved in council services.

If you're looking to gain new skills that could help you find employment, then tenant training poses an excellent opportunity. Our highly successful 'Ready for Work' events are also not to be missed.

And finally, if anyone finds themselves facing financial hardship, help is at hand through our free budgeting and money advice service. Have a look at our top tips for managing on a budget and don't be afraid to call if you would like to have more support.

We hope you find the information in this *TLC* of use.

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.



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

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Norwich City Council events

In Focus: Tenant involvement panel



This latest instalment of 'In Focus' looks at the role of our tenant involvement panel (TIP).

The panel was set up in 2013 to operate alongside our tenant scrutiny panel. It has a specific focus on reviewing housing publications, policies, and finance issues, including rent and budget setting.

TIP representatives Eunice, from Brooke Place, and Vic, from Regina Road, have been council tenants for a number of years and previously sat on the former Citywide Board, which the new panels have replaced.

We caught up with Vic and Eunice to find out about their experiences of being on the TIP.

What made you want to get involved?

Vic: I want to work with council officers and my fellow tenants to improve the areas we live in, which will hopefully be to everyone's benefit.

What particular subjects are you interested in?

Eunice: I enjoy having an input into *TLC* magazine and the annual report, striving to ensure they are both informative and a pleasure to read.

Vic: Kitchens and bathroom upgrades, adaptations, tackling antisocial behaviour, waste and recycling and estate management improvement projects.

How do you see your role as a panel member?

Eunice: I try to use my influence over the council to better the lives of city council tenants.



Vic at a design consultation.

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

Eunice: You need some basic training and the council runs an excellent programme. You also need to be committed to attending meetings to maintain your interest.

Vic: To be a good listener and have empathy for people. You need to be committed and be able to work well with other people, which the tenant training can really help with.

What skills have you gained from being involved?

Eunice: I have learned to work in a team and also find that volunteering for other projects gives a wider insight into city council activities.

Vic: Public speaking and the confidence to chair meetings. I have also learned a lot about how the council works.

If you would like to get involved with any of our tenant initiatives please email involvement@norwich.gov.uk or call the tenant involvement team on **0344 980 3333**.

You don't need to join a panel to access free tenant training, so if you'd just like to boost your confidence and learn new skills please see the back cover of *TLC* for further details.



Panel members and council staff visiting new homes at Eglington Mews.

Estate audit programme gets results



Tenants and council officers on a recent audit.

Tenant-led estate audits have been regularly taking place since 2010, and as the initiative approaches its first major milestone, we take a closer look at what's involved.

Keen to make a difference, two tenant volunteers committed to improving communal areas across the city, have been working with us to carry out a programme of estate audits.

Supported by our service development team, come rain

or shine, Terry Adkin and Les King have been visiting various council-owned sites to provide a tenant perspective on the condition of the communal areas.

They score areas against 24 elements, assisted by a photobook which illustrates good and bad examples. They assess aspects ranging from car parks to light fittings and grassed areas to bin stores.

Council officers record the scores and make notes on a specially designed sheet, taking photos to identify particular issues and to pinpoint their locations.

Meetings are then organised to make the relevant managers aware of any required actions, as well as planning the next round of visits. Les and Terry are sent the completed work sheets for each audit so they can see clearly how the points raised are being addressed.

A recent development has been to include contract development officers in the visits as they're able to provide insight into contractual arrangements for grass cutting and maintaining shrubberies, as well as the management of waste and recycling. Housing officers

and caretakers also provide vital local knowledge on site.

The scheme has been running since August 2010 and almost 100 visits have now taken place across 66 sites, with those requiring improvement receiving a repeat visit. Originally confined to caretaker managed sites only, the audits have now evolved to include other communal areas and sheltered housing schemes too.

Les says: "Estate audits are a good example of one of the many ways the council is listening to its tenants.

"As a result of these audits we have seen significant improvements across our housing estates and have been able to discuss, first hand with council officers, problems that arise in particular areas, and how they can be tackled. This has been far better than a one size fits all approach."

If you would like our estate auditors to visit where you live please email **involvement@norwich.gov.uk** or call **0344 980 3333**.



Turning your feedback into action

A project to create recycling facilities for tenants and leaseholders in more than 6,000 flats across the city has now been successfully completed, thanks to your feedback.

Many flats previously had very limited recycling facilities, or in some cases, none at all, which has led to the creation of new user-friendly external bin compounds.

This means waste no longer has to be stored inside properties or inappropriately stored in internal communal areas until collection day.

Tenants and leaseholders have also been issued with small kitchen caddies to help residents easily transport food waste to the communal food bin.

Cabinet member for housing, Councillor Bert Bremner, says:

“Tenant initiatives such as patch panels and estate audits really help to bring local issues to the attention of council officers, and this project clearly demonstrates the results that can be achieved by people sharing their views.

“As well as helping the environment, recycling also generates hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of recycling credits which can be reinvested into council services for the benefit of everyone.”

One of the new recycling areas at Sleaford Green.



If you would like us to hold a patch panel to discuss local issues where you live please email **involvement@norwich.gov.uk** or call us on the number below.



For more detailed information about recycling, or to order a free kitchen caddy if you don't already have one, email info@norwich.gov.uk or call 0344 980 3333.



Make your voice heard

Join the Talkback Panel and have your say on housing services

Hundreds of tenants and leaseholders have been sharing their views through our Talkback Panel for the last three years – so now it's your chance to join them.

Panel members are invited to take part in two or three telephone surveys per year, on a variety of topics.

Each survey takes no more than 15 minutes to complete and an independent market research company ensures your responses remain anonymous.



Mrs Smith, one of our latest winners.

As well as the chance to air your views, we randomly select two involved tenants each year to receive a free hamper of goodies. So come on, what are you waiting for?

If you are keen to join the Talkback Panel or you'd like to know more, please email involvement@norwich.gov.uk or call **0344 980 3333**.

We recently asked Talkback members for their views on rents, benefits and money advice. Here's what you said, and what we did as a result...

You said...

We did...



Most people feel the council offers a wide range of ways to pay rent, but some of you would like to be able to check your rent balance online.

We are working closely with our IT service provider to resolve security issues which are currently preventing us from offering this service.

Some of you were not aware of our free money-advice and budgeting services.

See the article on the next page for full details of the services on offer.

Two-thirds of you said you'd prefer we wait until Universal Credit is about to come into effect before we communicate with you about how the new benefit system will work.

We have taken this into account and will update you further once we have the roll-out dates for our region and your claim type is confirmed.

STAR update



We carry out a STAR (Survey of Tenants And Residents) every two years to get a broad picture of what tenants think of our services.

The results help us to focus our resources on areas that are most important to our tenants, and the standard questions used enable us to compare our performance against similar

housing providers. These results also help the Homes and Communities Agency to regulate all social landlords.

Those of you who were randomly selected to take part in the survey will already have been contacted by market research company Wyman Dillon, who conducted the survey on our behalf.

The company will shortly be providing us with the results of the survey, which we will share with you in a future edition of *TLC magazine*.

We would like to thank all tenants who took part this time round and encourage future participants to spare a few minutes for the next survey, as your views are important to us.

Are you struggling to keep on top of your bills?

Money problems getting you down? If so, it's time to take control!

Free specialist advice is available to all council tenants. Try following these simple tips for managing on a tight budget – and don't be afraid to ask for more help.

- Write down how much you have coming in and how much goes out. Working out a weekly or monthly budget is essential to bringing bills under control.
- If you're not sure where the money is going, keep a spending diary for a couple of weeks. Those little extra expenses soon add up!
- Prioritise your payments. Sort out your essential payments for rent, fuel, council tax etc to give you some peace of mind.
- Get loans or credit card bills under control. Credit debts can be the most stressful and have high

interest rates. A money adviser may be able to help get your payments reduced.

- Plan ahead. If you have anything to spare, a credit union savings account is a great way to save for either a rainy day or an unexpected expense.

Council tenants can also make use of two great services, outlined as follows:

Budgeting advice

This service is friendly and informal and usually just requires one session – which can take place in your home. You can ask our advisers about:

- Managing a regular budget
- Claiming benefits
- Getting the best energy deals

- Coping with 'bedroom tax'
- Choosing a water meter
- Opening a basic bank account.

Money advice

This service is for people with serious debt problems in need of ongoing support. Our advisers can help:

- Negotiate with your creditors to ease the pressure
- Claim all the benefits you're entitled to
- Boost your confidence to deal with debt problems and break the cycle.

Email housingincome@norwich.gov.uk or call 0344 980 3333 to ask for advice or to make an appointment. It's never too late to take control.

Don't miss our 'Ready for Work' event!

Another highly successful 'Ready for Work' event took place at The Halls earlier this year, featuring more than 50 stands to help people find work and new opportunities.

There were a greater number of jobs on offer at this year's

event, with many attendees securing interviews on the day.

Look out for the next event coming this autumn.

- Help finding work
- Start your own business
- Money advice
- ... and much more



Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

Foster rebrand

One of our main maintenance partners, Foster Property Maintenance Ltd, has recently undergone a rebrand following a takeover by Lakehouse Group.

Going forward they will be known simply as 'Foster'.

Foster



Following the rebrand, the company's vans have a new-look so that they're in keeping with other parts of Lakehouse Group (as shown in the picture). In addition, their logo, uniforms, signage and literature has also been updated, or is in the process of being changed.

The service delivered to customers will not be affected by the change and all staff carry

identification at all times – which you should always ask to see before letting anyone into your home.



Extra support for vulnerable customers

We would like to make you aware of a free support service that's available to vulnerable tenants or leaseholders in the event of a power cut.

The service is provided by UK Power Networks who are responsible for the routing of power supplies to homes and businesses across our region.



It is available, immediately, to anyone who meets one of the below criteria (other circumstances can also be considered on request):

- Dependent on medical equipment
- Chronically ill
- Disabled
- Visually impaired or blind
- Hearing impaired or deaf
- Elderly customers
- Resident of a nursing or residential home
- Customers with young babies.

Your power will not be restored quicker than anyone else, but you will receive:

- A priority number that can be called 24/7 in the event of a power cut
- Regular text messages or phone updates during a power cut
- A welcome pack with useful advice about preparing for a power cut
- Extra support from the British Red Cross.

Anyone interested in receiving this service can register in the following ways: www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/priority
e: psr@ukpowernetworks.co.uk
t: 0800 31 63 105

Reporting repairs made easier

It's now easier than ever to report housing repairs to the council, thanks to new software which means that more jobs are successfully completed first time round.

We took the decision in 2013 to invest in new software to aid our customer contact team when diagnosing repair issues with customers. We wanted to make it easier for them to book repair jobs, while also ensuring our contractors and their operatives have all the information they need to hand.

We worked with our maintenance partners to evaluate the various systems on the market before deciding which solution to go with, and after a successful trial our advisors have been using the new software since June 2014.

Advisors are guided through a series of scripted questions and pictures to make logging repairs quicker, easier and more accurate.

The system incorporates all our latest policies and procedures, automatically ensuring the correct order code, contractor and response time is raised at the first point of contact.

Our advisors are also able to make suggestions for improvement directly to the software developers, enabling ongoing tailoring that will ultimately improve the customer experience further.

The next phase of the project is to build all our future planned works programmes into the system as part of the decent homes upgrade. This will allow us to develop email capabilities to facilitate automated communication with contractors, which in turn will reduce the time it takes an advisor to deal with each call, enabling them to help more customers and reduce call-wait times.



We're also working with developers to build an online version of the software for tenants who report their repairs via the website, using the guided questions and images to enable a more detailed and accurate description of the fault to be recorded in our systems.

Tina Bailey, head of customer services, said:

"Dealing with a number of contractors and a variety of systems can be a challenge. Customers perceptions of the cause of the problem, and the work needed to put it right, will also vary. However, this new system helps us to work towards making sure that all repairs are recorded accurately, first time. This means we can improve how effectively we work with our contractors, which can only be good news for our customers."



Customer centre advisor.

All non-urgent repairs can be reported online at www.norwich.gov.uk

To report urgent repairs or speak to an advisor call 0344 980 3333.



Tackling condensation and mould



Drying clothes outdoors is always the best option whenever the weather allows and where it's safe to do so. But there are still things you can do indoors to prevent the build-up of condensation in your home that can lead to mould growth.

An over-bath dryer is a relatively cheap piece of equipment and sits easily over any standard bath. If you open the window, close the door and make sure that the bathroom extractor fan is on, you will stop any moisture build up. This will help to prevent any mould spores from forming and growing.

Try following these tips:

- Dry clothes in a well ventilated room, keeping the door fully closed.
- Do not heat cold bedrooms by opening the door to heated rooms. The warm and

humid air will condensate on the cold walls of the bedroom.

- Keep your heating on at a constant low temperature (not less than 15 degrees Celsius), even when away from the home. This is proven to be more cost effective too.
- Consider investing in an over-bath dryer.
- Use your extractor fans.
- Open windows when using the kitchen, bathroom, or drying clothes.
- Wipe down any windows or window sills that may become wet in order to avoid moisture build up. This in turn will prevent mould spores from forming.
- Treat any mould that does form with a specialist fungicidal cleaning agent, as bleach and other household products will not kill it.

Mould is a living organism and will quickly spread if it is not treated immediately.

For more information on tackling condensation and mould in your home please email info@norwich.gov.uk or call **0344 980 3333**.

Communal washing lines

There are dedicated clothes drying areas for your use located in the external communal areas of many of our flats across the city.

All rotary dryers are maintained by us, so please report any issues to the customer contact team who will arrange for the dryer to be repaired or replaced if necessary.

We also maintain the more traditional fixed washing line posts that are concreted into the floor, but residents are responsible for providing their own washing lines. These should be strung up to the posts to hang washing out and then removed again once the washing is dry – this is to ensure the line does not cause harm to anyone when not in use.



Reporting benefit fraud

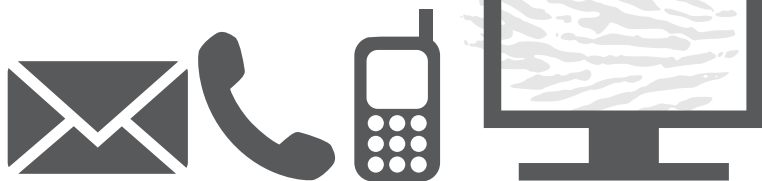
All housing benefit fraud referrals are now handled directly by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

If you suspect someone of housing benefit fraud, you can report it confidentially in any of the three ways described below.

By telephone:

Freephone the National Benefit Fraud Hotline on 0800 854 440 or text phone 0800 328 0512.

Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm.



By post:

NBFH, PO Box 224, Preston PR1 1GP.

Online at:

www.gov.uk/report-benefit-fraud

Our current fraud hotline is closing but all other types of suspected fraud can be reported on our website

www.norwich.gov.uk



Our Home Options policy, which determines how we allocate social housing in Norwich, is due to be updated later this year. As part of this process we will be seeking tenants' views on our proposed updates to the policy via a consultation that is due to begin this summer.

Further details will be made available at www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk as things progress, so please keep an eye on the website if you're interested in taking part.

Information for leaseholders

Our insurance contract with Zurich Municipal came up for renewal in October so we consulted with leaseholders on insurance options for leasehold properties going forward.

One of the outcomes of the consultation was an agreement to arrange cover with Aspen Insurance – a company experienced in providing insurance services for this particular sector.

As well as covering the standard risks that leaseholders were previously covered for, we were also able to obtain a higher level of cover.

This means leaseholders can now claim for items such as damage to a hob or worktop under the extended accidental damage cover.

Under the new policy, we have also reduced the types of claim where an excess would be payable.

Aspen provides a 24-hour claims helpline for leaseholders. Call 0800 368 2222 if you need assistance with a potential claim.

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

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

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

Want to LEARN NEW SKILLS?

AND BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE?

Join our **FREE** training course exclusively for Norwich City Council tenants

You can learn:

- Communication skills
- Teamwork skills
- Positive thinking and behaviour
- Presentation skills
- Public speaking skills

Meet like-minded people and make new friends while gaining a better understanding of how the council works.

Just 2 hours per week

Small, friendly group in a venue to suit you

Day and evening options available

FREE refreshments and transport (if needed)

Call the tenant involvement team to book a place or find out more.

t: 01603 212235
e: 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