

t1c

Tenants' and leaseholders' community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Autumn/Winter 2015

ACHIEVEMENT
AWARDS 2015

FINALIST



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NEW! Did you know you can now report your repairs online?

To report all non-urgent repairs:

- Go to www.norwich.gov.uk/repairs
- Click 'report non-urgent repair'
- Enter your details

And let the repairs software guide you through the rest...

It is available 24/7 and works with PCs, tablets and smartphones.

Report repairs online
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Introduction from Councillor Gail Harris Welcome to the autumn/ winter issue of *TLC* magazine

Councillor Gail Harris, Norwich City Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and wellbeing.

I was delighted to see tenants move into their new council homes at Brazen Gate and hope these are the first of many more to come, with a number of exciting developments already planned for the near future.

It was wonderful to meet this year's Good Neighbour finalists at the recent award ceremony. I would like to commend everyone who was nominated for their kind deeds. As a council tenant myself, I know what an important role good neighbours play in building strong communities.

We have made some fantastic achievements in the last year,

detailed in the annual report summary. We are making good progress but need your help to make your housing services even better. Do get in touch if you have ideas for improving where you live or would like to be more involved with the council. Don't forget that you can also now report your repairs online.

There is free tenant training available that can boost your skills or just give you a chance to meet new people. You could even be involved in producing this magazine or next year's report.

We've included some great budgeting tips that we could all

use on the run-up to Christmas and anyone who has never tried our Big Switch and Save scheme, should definitely sign up for the new one starting this December to see if you can save on your utility bills.

As some residents get ready for the introduction of Universal Credit, I would like to encourage anyone who needs help to ask for it and look out for our future Ready For Work events.

We hope you enjoy this last issue of *TLC* for 2015 and wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

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?

Housing Service performance from April 2015 to June 2015

Each shape indicates how we are performing against our targets



Above, or on target



Close to target



Below target



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: Lynn Ringer and Councillor Gail Harris at the new flats in Brazen Gate.

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Norwich City Council events

New council homes at Brazen Gate

The first tenants have moved into the latest release of newly-built, council-owned homes at Brazen Gate in Norwich.

A mix of 23, one and two-bedroom flats are being delivered for Norwich City Council on the former car park site off Southwell Road, as part of Charles Church's wider development of 86 homes.

People have now moved into the first nine properties, with another 14 units due for completion early next year.

All of the affordable homes are being allocated through Home Options, the council's choice-based lettings scheme.

One of the first tenants to move in was Lynn Ringer. She had been living in a three-bedroom council property in Bowthorpe for the last 26 years and wanted to downsize as her children had moved out.



Lynn Ringer gets the keys to her new flat from Councillor Gail Harris.

Lynn received a priority banding to be re-housed as she was freeing up a three-bedroom family home and had been waiting for the right place to come up.

"I am delighted with my brand new flat," she said. "I work in the city centre, so I'm now very close to my work and this flat is more than I could ever wish for. It's perfect for me."

The Brazen Gate development follows a landmark development at Pointer's Field last year, which saw the first council homes to be built in the city since

1992, sparking a resurgence in council house building.

Further homes are already planned at Three Score, Goldsmith Street, Hansard Close and Riley Close, with other sites also in the pipeline.

Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing, said: "It is fantastic to see our house building programme really starting to take shape and I would like to see us build more new homes in the future."

"I wish all the tenants well in their new homes and I'm delighted that providing these new flats will also help other families to gain desperately needed housing."

In addition to the 23 new council properties, five units were sold by Charles Church (a subsidiary of Persimmon Homes) on a 75 per cent shared equity basis, ensuring Brazen Gate complies with the council's policy on affordable housing provision.



The Brazen Gate development.

Annual report to tenants 2014-15

The following four pages provide a brief overview of some of our key achievements over the last financial year (April 2014 to March 2015). Tenants and council officers work together to produce this report, which we hope you will find of interest.

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 or call the involvement team on **0344 980 3333**.

Tenant involvement, empowerment and customer care

Delivering Local Offers

Local Offers are a set of pledges we have made to you based on what you have told us is important with regard to keeping you involved.

Under the Local Offers, we will:

1 provide a variety of opportunities for you to help shape the service you receive

2 improve the way we communicate with you

3 work with you to make your neighbourhood cleaner and safer

4 offer you more chances to be involved in the delivery and monitoring of the repairs and maintenance service.

We have achieved the Local Offers in 2014/15 by:

- more than 1,500 people attending housing-related events
- forming a new tenant panel focused on sheltered housing
- forming a tenant group to advise us on their preferred materials for upgrade works
- tenant representatives joining the NPS Liaison Board
- completing our fourth tenant training academy

Whenever you see this logo it indicates the service has generated savings or improved value for money.



- organising contractor visits and staff shadowing days for involved tenants
- winning the ARCH Award for encouraging tenant empowerment
- increasing the number of patch panels
- organising fun days (attended by 1,300 residents)
- delivering three editions of *TLC*, with all content approved by the tenant panel
- the readers' panel reviewing council documents and awarding the 'Tenant Tick'
- carrying out 39 estate improvement projects
- regularly keeping you up-to-date on our performance via the performance scorecard.



Customer contact team

- Increased staff training has led to improvements in quality of service and reductions in call waiting times.
- New computer software, which identifies required repairs from the initial enquiry, has increased the number of repairs being completed at first visit.



Tenants and staff visit Pointer's Field.

The families unit

The families unit provides specialist intensive support to families with multiple and complex needs. In 2014/15:

- a new three-year partnership was formed with Norfolk County Council to deliver family support under the Government's Troubled Families Programme
- a new youth mediation role was created to prevent homelessness among 14 to 18-year-olds
- short-term targeted interventions were developed to reduce the number of children being taken into care

- a new webpage was developed for the service to increase engagement with service users.

Sheltered housing

- The refurbishment of St James' House sheltered housing scheme is due for completion in March 2016 and will set the standard for future scheme development.
- Sheltered tenants moving to alternative city council accommodation as part of the transformation received properties that were refurbished to an enhanced standard.

This is now being under taken for all sheltered housing properties when they become vacant.

- The communal lounges and guestroom at the Silkfields scheme were refurbished.
- The former scheme manager's accommodation at Harry Perry Close was redeveloped to create two new one-bedroom sheltered flats.
- The sheltered housing improvement panel (SHIP) was formed to increase engagement and consultation with sheltered housing tenants.

Your Home

Upgrades, adaptations and improvements

We have completed the third year of our five-year programme to deliver the Norwich Standard to all homes by 2017 (below are this year's stats).

Further upgrades are planned for 2015/16. Energy efficiency improvements will meanwhile see a programme of loft and cavity wall insulations carried out, along with external wall insulation to 80 homes and the installation of solar panels at a further 200 properties.

New homes

- The completion of eight one-bedroom flats at Pointer's Field became the first council-owned homes to be built in the city since 1992.

- Plans were submitted for the second phase of the Three Score development, featuring 57 new council homes.
- Plans were drawn up for the redevelopment of Goldsmith St – featuring 105 new homes.
- A deal was made to purchase 23 council homes on the Brazen Gate development.



- Work started on converting former sheltered housing scheme, Britannia Court, into two separate blocks of refurbished flats that will be let through Home Options. It is due for completion in March 2016.
- A public consultation was launched for the development of 10 new flats on the site of the former area housing office at Hansard Close.

£18.7 million	spent on upgrades and improvements
£875,000	spent on adaptations
1,546	new kitchens installed
1,062	new bathrooms installed
863	new heating systems installed
2,650	properties received new front and back doors
288	homes had their windows replaced
92%	percentage of council homes that now meet the Norwich Standard

Your Tenancy

Housing management

A total of 80 per cent of tenants have now had a tenancy health check in the last five years. As part of this process we're taking optional photos of existing tenants, which is now standard procedure for all new tenancies to help reduce tenancy fraud.



Income and rents

In 2014/15 the team have:

- successfully piloted the use of a computerised texting service to improve communication with customers
- provided money and budgeting advice to more than 800 tenants facing financial difficulties

- worked closely with other council teams to help tenants with multiple council debts
- continued to provide a variety of support to tenants affected by welfare reform, including help completing Discretionary Housing Payment claim forms.

Housing options

In 2014/15 the team have:

- processed 99 per cent of all new applications for housing within one day of receipt
- increased opening hours for the specialist housing advice drop-in service, enabling more clients to be helped than ever before



In March 2015 the housing options team was invited to give a presentation on its work in the field of homelessness prevention at the national Shelter Conference in London.



- introduced a text reminder service for property viewings
- introduced the attendance of occupational therapists at viewings for adapted properties so they can advise on suitability and further potential adaptations based on their specific needs
- prevented 596 instances of potential homelessness, with only eight per cent of clients that present as facing homelessness, going on to make a homeless presentation.



	2013/14	2014/15
Tenant's, arrears as % of total rent due to the council	2.65%	3.14%
Average amount owed	£222	£294
Evictions for non-payment of rent	19	13



New homes on the edge of Pointer's Field.

Your Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood teams work closely with residents, housing officers, police and other agencies to address ongoing local issues and improve where you live.

Walkabouts and estate inspections are just two of the many ways the council works with tenants and leaseholders.

The estate improvement projects carried out across the city include

new pathways, walls, railings, benches, bollards, improved parking facilities, gates, shed makeovers and the introduction of playground games.

All reports of antisocial behaviour are recorded and investigated, with the most serious cases referred to the antisocial behaviour and tenancy enforcement (ABATE) team.

*** Closure orders are civil orders which stop anyone entering, or residing, at a property. They require close partnership working with local police to obtain.**



Walkabouts	48
Estate inspections	23
Estate improvement projects	39

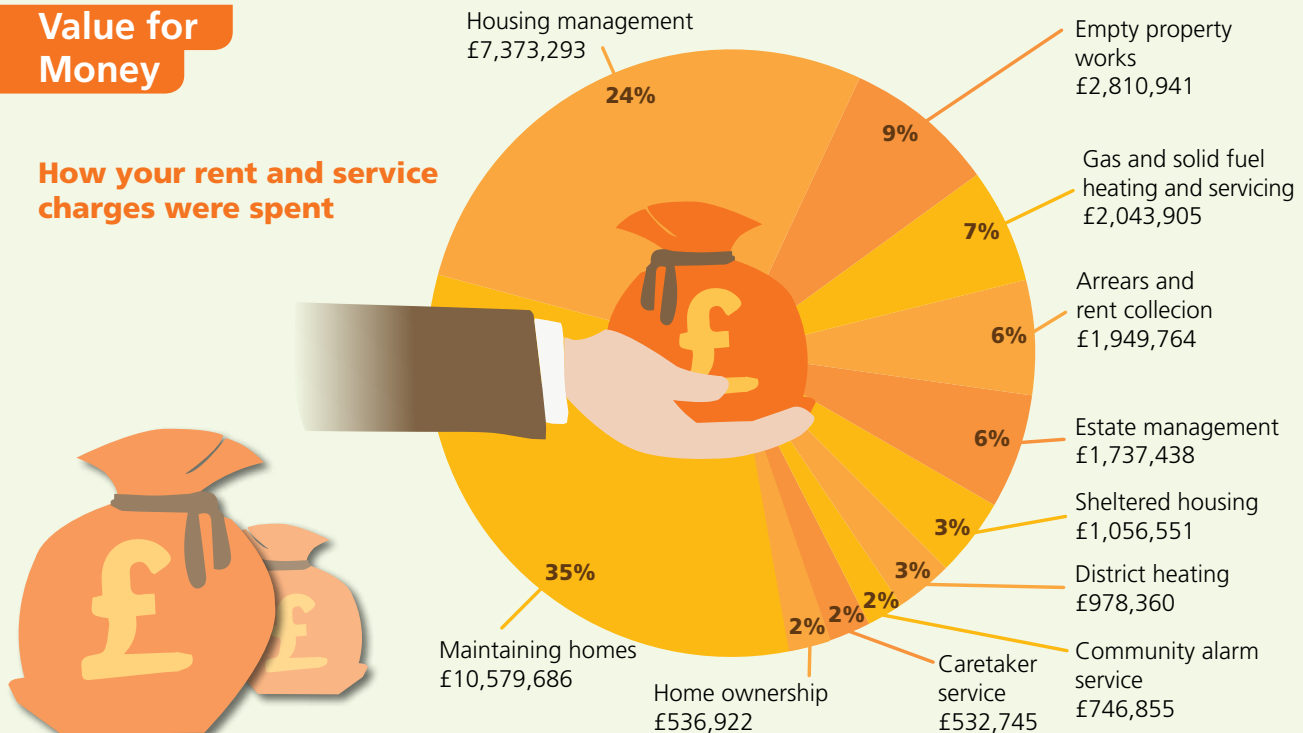
Reports of antisocial behaviour (ASB)	3,060
Reports of housing-related ASB	2,071
Most common complaint type	Noise
Cases referred to the ABATE team	191
% cases successfully closed	92%
Closure orders*	6



Estate improvements at St James and Barrack Street.

Value for Money

How your rent and service charges were spent



Good neighbour awards 2015

This year's Good Neighbour finalists attended a tea party in the Lord Mayor's parlour in celebration of their achievements on 17 September.

Following speeches from the Lord Mayor and tenant judges, Gordon Batch from Tuckswood was crowned this year's winner.

He was nominated by Mrs Knights, his neighbour of 20

years. Gordon and his late wife Shirley provided her with great support after she lost her husband – not least by helping with childcare, so she could continue to work and provide for her children.



This year's finalists in the Lord Mayor's parlour.

After remarrying in 2003, Mrs Knights returned from a short trip away to discover Gordon had built a canopy over her back door, which is still there to this day and provides shelter on rainy days.

She said: "He is always there to help and is always fixing things. Even though he's in his eighties, he still brings in our wheelie bin every week.

"We have a good neighbourhood and we all look after each other, but Gordon is definitely a worthy winner of this award. I don't know what we would have done without all his support over the years.

Lord Mayor of Norwich, Councillor Brenda Arthur, congratulated all of this year's finalists and said: "A willingness to show kindness to one another is what lies at the heart of our strong communities and it's people like you that make Norwich a truly fine city."

Fair work for a fair wage

A number of events are being held this autumn to help people get jobs, skills and a fair wage.

More than 200 people attended our latest Ready For Work event at The Halls in September. It featured a broad mix of employers offering a wide range of jobs, along with apprenticeships, digital skills, training and

practical help and advice for getting into work.

A week of activities and workshops is planned at venues across the city for Living Wage Week 1-7 November. It aims to push for better salaries for Norwich's lowest paid workers and provides advice to people struggling with low pay.

The current UK Living Wage is £7.85 per hour (outside of

London) for those over 18, whereas the national minimum wage for those over 21 is £6.50 rising to £6.70 in October this year. In Norwich, more than one in four employees earns less than £7 per hour.

To access the full list of events being staged throughout Norwich's Living Wage Week and to be kept updated on future Ready For Work events, visit www.norwich.gov.uk/news and sign up for an alert.

Take control and see what you can save

Christmas is always an important month to plan your spending. And with Universal Credit arriving in Norwich for some residents, there's no better time to look for ways to save money with these top tips.

Know your budget

Work out your income and outgoings and draw up a budget. Revisit it on a regular basis, especially when your circumstances change.

Could a water meter save you money?

A water meter can be installed for free and could save a typical family nearly £100 a year in water rates. Find out more by calling Anglian Water on **0800 800 580** or visit **www.anglianwater.co.uk**.

Shop around for gas and electricity

Switching suppliers could save you money, even if you have a prepayment meter. Check whether you are entitled to any discounts and find the best tariff for your circumstances. Sign up to our Big Switch and Save scheme (on the back cover of this issue) to see if you could make further savings.

Replacing white goods

Consider opening a Credit Union account to save for

one-off purchases. Depending on your circumstances you could be able to obtain a grant or loan for replacing essential items like washing machines and cookers. Contact our advisers to find out more.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

We have a specialist team of money and budgeting advisers that offer a free, confidential service, tailored to meet your personal needs.

If you need help:

- email **moneyadvisers@norwich.gov.uk**
- ask your housing officer or income officer to make a referral for you
- call the council's customer contact team on **0344 980 3333**.

What Universal Credit means for rent payments

From December, new jobseekers from single person households will be the first Norwich residents who will need to claim Universal Credit (UC). This will be a single, monthly payment paid direct to claimants, in place of Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and Housing Benefit.

UC will eventually replace housing benefit for most working age people claiming benefits.

Some of the above costs apply only to certain homes, so check your annual rent notification letter.

Take control of your rent payments:

- You will need to budget for paying your full rent and service charges directly to the council yourself and make the remainder of your money last for the rest of the month.

- Check your housing costs. If you are used to having Housing Benefit paid weekly, straight to your rent account, you may not be aware of the different charges that may make up the full rent of your home.

Housing cost	Eligible for UC?
Basic rent	Yes
Water rates	No
District heating	No
Caretaking charges	Yes
Service charges	Yes
Contents insurance	No



Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

NEW

Over the last few months we have been developing a new way for tenants to book their non-urgent repairs online. The new system, called Keyfax Online, went live on 1 September and replaces the previous web form.

Keyfax has a more user-friendly look and feel and guides you through a series of quick and easy, multiple choice questions to ensure we have the information we need to get your repair ordered right first time.



It is available 24/7 and works with PCs, tablets and smartphones.

Did you know you can report your repairs online?

We invited a group of representatives from the tenants' panel to try it out before we went live and their feedback was extremely positive.

Eve Bennell, from the tenants' panel, said: "I had never used the online 'report a repair form', but having used the new Keyfax online system, I will definitely report repairs via the website from now on."

To report all non-urgent repairs:

- go to www.norwich.gov.uk/repairs
- click 'report non-urgent repair'
- Enter your details and let the repairs software guide you through the rest.

Please help us to reduce blockages

In recent years we've seen an increased number of repair callouts for blocked toilets and drains.

Some of the most common items which can cause blockages include: toilet, baby and cleaning wipes, food waste, fat and oil, nappies, sanitary pads and cottonbuds.

Any of these items can cause problems with the plumbing, particularly if they are repeatedly disposed of in this way, over a long time.

Some residents don't realise the effect their actions can have, or that they can be recharged for blocked toilets and drains where they are deemed to be at fault.

Please help us reduce callouts for this type of repair by ensuring you don't flush any inappropriate items down the toilet, or pour inappropriate waste down the kitchen or bathroom sink.

Information for leaseholders

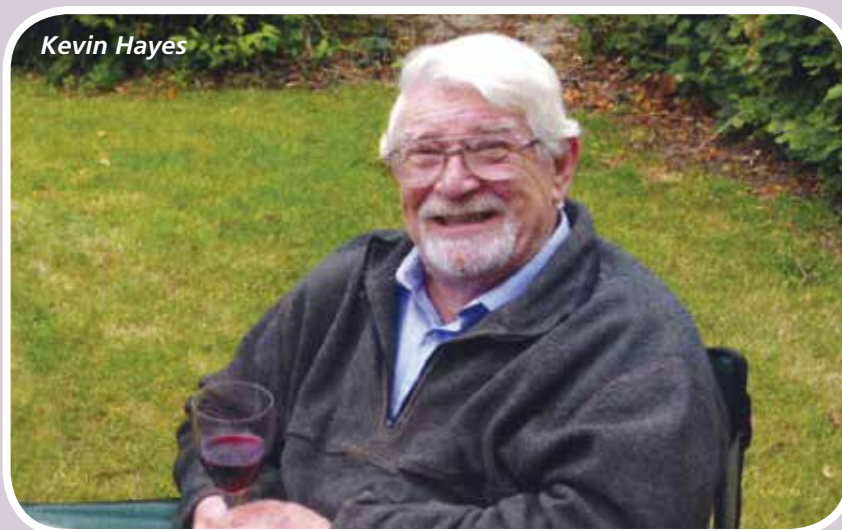
A tribute to Kevin Hayes

We are sad to report that Kevin Hayes, chair of the Norwich Leaseholders Association (NLA), passed away suddenly in August. Kevin was involved with the NLA from 2009, becoming secretary and then chair in 2011. He was a champion for council leaseholders throughout Norwich and gave up a great deal of his time to deal with both general and individual concerns, and bring about changes in how leasehold properties are managed.

Council officers, while sometimes not agreeing with Kevin, always found him to be polite, good humoured and professional. He will be sadly missed.

Lorna Kirk, secretary to the NLA, said: "The NLA would like to acknowledge the huge debt many leaseholders owed Kevin for past help. His knowledge was invaluable and unmeasurable to the NLA."

New contact details for the NLA will be publicised when the remaining committee members have met to agree the way forward.



Kevin Hayes

Running a business from your council property?

Anyone running a business from a council property – whether rented, or leased – should ask our permission before doing so. If permission is granted, you must arrange your own insurance for your business to ensure you are covered for any liabilities.

We arrange buildings insurance on behalf of residents in some flats and maisonettes. But this does not provide cover for any claims that may arise from any trade business or profession that is run from your property. Any private buildings insurance you hold is also unlikely to cover this.

To make sure you're complying with your tenancy or lease agreement and that the relevant landlord's permission has been granted, please contact us if you currently run, or plan to run, a business from your property. We can then grant permission, if appropriate.

We will need to know the nature of your business, whether it is run by you (the tenant or leaseholder) or a tenant of the leaseholder, and whether you already have any public liability insurance in place.



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

Text relay users only:
18001 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

Do you want to save money on your gas and electricity bills?

Well, Norwich's Big Switch and Save can help.

It's quick, easy and free, with no obligation.

The scheme is open to tenants, homeowners and businesses, and includes homes with prepaid meters.

You could save over £200 a year!



Visit www.bigswitchandsave.co.uk from 1 December to register...

Want to LEARN NEW SKILLS? AND BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE?

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

Just two hours per week

Small, friendly group in a venue to suit you

Day and evening options available

FREE refreshments and transport (if needed)

To find out more or to book your free place

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.