



# A blooming success

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## Silver lining

We are delighted to be awarded the Investors in People (IIP) Silver Accreditation, demonstrating our commitment to high performance through the way we manage our staff.

We needed to demonstrate we were meeting 9 key indicators - learning and inspiring people, living the organisation's value and behaviours, managing performance, recognising and rewarding high performance, structuring work, building capacity, delivering continuous improvement and creating sustainable success.

The assessment was carried out using surveys, interviews, meetings and observations. This included an online survey, which was completed by 90% of our staff.

“The accreditation is valid for three years and we are now aiming for Gold in 2019, our centenary year.”

The Investors in People assessor reported that there was clear evidence that staff are involved and empowered effectively; staff described communication as excellent; and the way that the Association listens to residents was deemed a considerable strength.

The accreditation is valid for three years and we are now aiming for Gold in 2019, our centenary year.



## Top rated

We are pleased to announce that we have once again achieved the highest possible rating – from our regulator the Homes and Communities Agency - for the way we are governed and financially managed.

Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands said: “The judgement speaks volumes for the professionalism and expertise of our board and staff team.

“It confirms we are in a strong position to deal with the ever-changing social housing sector and the opportunities and challenges that will be presented in the coming years.”

## Grant Funding

We are pleased to announce that we will be building even more new homes over the next few years.

This is because we have secured grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency to put towards several new developments.

We submitted three bids to the HCA's Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme 2016-2021 and all three were successful.

The HCA are giving us funding of £1.75 million to put towards the building of 44 homes in the County Durham, Darlington and East Riding areas. The total anticipated scheme costs will be £6.29 million.

Actual sites in these areas are yet to be confirmed but we will keep you updated in future editions of RHA News.



“We are delighted to have started work on what is our largest housing development in recent history.”

# Work underway in Darlington

Peter Elliot, of Tolent Solutions, Andrea Abbott and Anne Rowlands, from Railway Housing Association, and Paul Webster, of Tolent Solutions on the site of the new development.

**Work has started to build 73 new homes for rent in Darlington, which will include the conversion of a historic railway building.**

We are working with Tolent Solutions to build the new homes on a site just off Haughton Road, opposite Darlington College of Technology.

The site has now been cleared to pave the way for the construction of the two and three-bedroom houses, two-bedroom bungalows and one-bedroom apartments.

The new homes will be let to applicants nominated by Darlington Borough Council and from the Association's waiting list.

The homes are being built close to the historic 1825 Darlington to Stockton Railway Line. We will be incorporating an engine shed built in 1844 into the development. The shed, which has Listed building status, will be converted into mews-type houses. Giving the building a purpose will ensure it is preserved for the future.

The whole development, including the engine shed, will have an industrial feel in keeping with the site's historic past but at the same time providing modern, energy efficient homes. In response to comments made by the Friends of the 1825 Darlington & Stockton Railway during the planning process, the design was revised so that the homes are not built on the actual route of the original railway.

Completion of the £8 million development is scheduled for May 2018.

Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: “We are delighted to have started work on what is our largest housing development in recent history.

“Working with Tolent Solutions, we are excited about the prospect of providing much-needed new homes for local people in Darlington, and at a site which reflects both the town's and our own historical connections to the railway industry.”

# Changes to Housing Benefit

Since the last newsletter, the Government has announced some further changes to housing benefit.

**What does it mean for me?**

If you receive Universal Credit, then the amount of benefit that you can receive towards your rent from April 2019 may be limited.

The amount of benefit will be limited to the Local Housing Allowance rate for your household size that is currently allowed for private sector tenants.

You can find out the Local Housing Allowance rates for your area at <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/Search.aspx>

If your benefit changes to Universal Credit after April 2019 then the overall amount that you receive will be protected and will not be reduced.

If you receive housing benefit and your tenancy started after 1st April 2016, then the amount of housing benefit you can receive will be limited to the Local Housing Allowance rate for your household size that is currently allowed for private sector tenants. You can find out the Local Housing Allowance rates for your area at <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/Search.aspx>

**Aged 18-21 years?**

If you are 18-21 years old and you make a new claim for Universal Credit after 1 April 2017 then you may not receive any housing benefit towards your rent. You may be exempt from this change if you are a parent, don't have parents living in the UK, would be at risk of harm if made to live with your parents, have suffered domestic violence, have just left care, if you are disabled or if you are earning at least 16 hours at minimum wage level a week.

If you are aged 22 to 35 years old and do not have any dependent children living with you, from 1st April 2019 you will only receive the same amount of housing benefit that is payable for shared accommodation, even if you don't share your home with anyone else. You can find out the shared accommodation rate for your area at <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/Search.aspx>

If you live in sheltered housing and receive housing benefit towards your rent then the amount you receive will be protected and should not reduce.

**Will I also have to pay for any spare bedrooms?**

If you are of working age and have one or more spare bedrooms, the amount of housing benefit you receive will already be reduced.

From April 2019, your housing benefit will be limited by either the reduction for spare bedrooms OR the Local Housing Allowance rate for your household size, whichever is the biggest reduction.

If you are of pension age, from April 2019 your housing benefit will not be reduced for spare bedrooms but it will be limited to the Local Housing Allowance rate for the size of your household.

**What do I need to do now?**

If you start a new tenancy on or after 1st April 2016 and receive housing benefit towards your rent OR if you are in receipt of Universal Credit OR if you are 22 to 35 years of age then you will need to find out if your rent is higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate for your household and think about how you will pay any shortfall from April 2019.

If you are unsure what these changes will mean for you, please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or at [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR

If you are unsure what these changes will mean for you, please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428



Knowing my garden has been judged the best makes me feel very proud

## Best Kept Garden

**Gardening for over 70 years has paid off for Alan Hall after he won our annual gardening competition.**

The 83-year-old has been awarded the title of Best Kept Garden 2016.

His garden, in Murrough Wilson Place, York, was judged, by members of our Focus Groups, to be the best of all the entries received for the competition.

Mr Hall, who moved to York from London in the 1960s, said: "I started gardening when I was just seven and it's something I have enjoyed doing ever since.

"I like my garden to look nice so as well as flowers and plants, I also have lots of garden ornaments.

"I try to get out into my garden every day during the spring and summer, even if it's just for a short time to keep on top of things.

"I wasn't expecting to win but knowing my garden has been judged the best makes me feel very proud."

Mr Hall was presented with his prize – a trophy, £50 worth of high street vouchers and a plant for his garden – by Andrea Abbott, Railway Housing Association's Director of Customer Services.

She said: "You only have to look at Mr Hall's garden to see how much time and effort he puts in to make it look nice.

"The residents who judged the competition had so many amazing gardens to choose from, but Mr Hall's really stood out.

"It's pleasing to see so many people taking such pride in their gardens and we would like to thank everyone who entered."

We would like to thank construction and property consultants Hall and Partners for sponsoring the 2016 award.

**We'd love you to enter**

If your garden is as nice as Mr Hall's then we would love you to enter our 2017 Best Kept Garden competition. Once your garden is blooming in the summer, please send us a couple of pictures, along with your name, address and contact details.



## Your safety is our priority

**If we need to carry out gas safety or smoke alarm checks, or clean the shower in your home, it is essential that you let our in-house gas engineer or contractor in to do the work.**

These checks are organised for your safety and for the safety of your family and neighbours.

When a check is arranged please try to allow access on the day. If the date given is inconvenient, then please call us on freephone 08000 287428 to make alternative arrangements. If you have received a letter from us about safety checks to your home, please follow the instructions in the letter so that we can organise access around your requirements.

Your wellbeing in your home is paramount to us and we make every effort to keep you safe - please help us to carry out these essential safety checks.

## Car parking

### You said:

Car parking is a problem at some of the Association's schemes

### We did:

We checked the car parking at all of our schemes and looked at how we could solve any problems. There are a few schemes where car parking is a problem but it is not possible to provide any car parking or increase the number of spaces due to the physical constraints of the layout or location of the scheme, for example, at Prince Edward Road and Springfield Court.

There are several schemes where car parking spaces could be provided or increased but it would be very expensive.



## Great Western Court, Hereford

**Some of our residents were pleased to be able to present a cheque for £781.80 to their local St Michaels Hospice.**

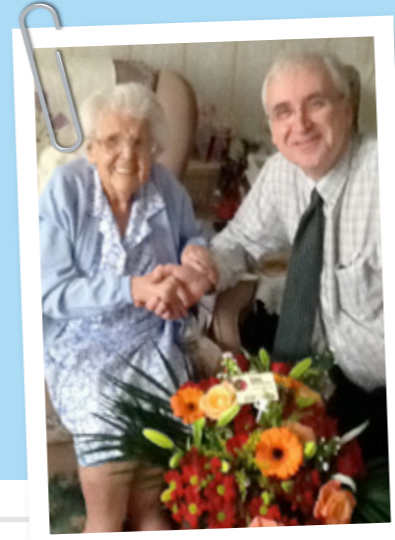
The money was all as a result of their fundraising efforts, and the Hospice was very grateful.

Our Growing Point Group also goes from strength to strength and a visit to Thruxton Rectory Gardens for afternoon tea was just one of the many recent highlights.

## 104 years' young

**Congratulations to Mrs Sage, from Forster House, Hull, who recently celebrated her 104th birthday.**

She is pictured being presented with flowers from Railway Housing Officer Peter Wilkinson.



## Good neighbour of the year

**A handyman has become the first person to win our good neighbour of the year award twice.**

Gordon Dixon's ability to do everything from changing a lightbulb through to mending household appliances made him the overwhelming winner of the 2016 Good Neighbour of the Year Award

Mr Dixon, who lives in Haddricks Mill, Gosforth, Newcastle, received the award for the help and assistance he gives to other residents.

The 80-year-old was nominated by his neighbours June Waite and Gladys Gradwell.

Mrs Waite said: "Gordon is very helpful and obliging. He looks after my house when I am away. He will do anything for any of the residents, such as putting up shelves and pictures, mending household appliances and cleaning the garden paths, but he refuses to take any payment. He keeps an eye out so I feel more secure."

Mrs Gradwell said: "Since I became ill he has visited me every day to check how I am and to ask if there is anything he can do for me. He gets me a daily paper and any shopping I need."

The good neighbour winner was chosen by residents, who are members of our Resident Forum and Focus Groups. The names of the people who were nominated - and it was a record year - were omitted, so when they voted for Mr Dixon they would not have realised he had won the award in 2011 - the first year of the awards.

Mr Dixon said: "I am thrilled to have become the first person to have won the award twice, especially in a year when there were so many nominations."

"I was an electrician and maintenance worker, so I have always been good at mending things and I see no reason to stop just because I am retired."

"I am not happy if I haven't 70 jobs to do on my list; I just like helping others."

Mr Dixon received his trophy and a cheque for £50 at the 2016 residents' conference. The good neighbour of the year competition was once again sponsored by Drivers Solicitors.

### 2017 Entries Now Open

If you have a neighbour who does great things for others, then we would love to hear about them. Entries for our 2017 Good Neighbour of the Year Competition are now open. Please refer to the leaflet enclosed with this edition of RHA News.



Gordon Dixon and his wife Mary with Samantha McAfee, from Drivers Solicitors, and Geoff Proudlock, Former Chairman of Railway Housing Association.

# Conference round-up

**There were lots of new faces at our 2016 annual residents' conference, with half the people present attending for the first time.**

The theme of the conference, which was again held in the Royal York Hotel in York, was value for money.

In his last conference before stepping down as Railway Housing Association Chairman, Geoff Proudlock, opened by talking about our mission and values, before speaking about our priorities for 2016-21.

The Association's Director of Customer Services, Andrea Abbott, then revealed what we spend our residents' rents on, including £10.5 million on maintenance over the next five years.

Residents were asked their views on a range of publications, including RHA News and Maintenance Mail, as well as letterheads and whether rent statements should be sent out as regularly as they are (the results are shown on the opposite page).

As always, the day ended with a fun quiz and raffle with prizes including an overnight stay for two at the Royal York. This was won by Doreen Moore, from Park Parade, Leeds, who said she was delighted to have won the prize.

We would like to thank everybody who contributed on the day and we look forward to seeing you at this year's 'Grand Day Out', which will take place at a new venue, The Marriott Hotel in York. If you would like to attend please call freephone 0800 0287428.



Above: Doreen Moore won an overnight stay for two at the Royal York.



## Residents said

### Rent statements

It costs £4,940 (£3.53 per property) to send 4 rent statements to each resident every year.

### Newsletters

It costs £9,144 (£6.53 per property) to send 4 newsletters to each resident every year.

### Letterhead

Alternative languages are printed on the back of our headed paper meaning that we use twice as much paper for each letter.

### Annual report

It costs an extra £980 (£0.70 per property) to print the annual report as a calendar.

### Estate inspections

It costs £7,500 every year in staff time plus the printing and postage costs of sending 4 letters to 1,229 residents about the inspections.

One statement a year is enough and will save £3,705 (£2.65 per property).

We like the newsletters but the number of issues could be reduced; and copies could be made available in communal lounges of sheltered schemes, rather than sending a copy to each resident.

Remove the information from the letterhead and manage translation and language issues on application and/or at the start of tenancies.

Residents at the conference had mixed views but 80% of residents who are focus group or residents' forum members use the calendar.

Residents had mixed views – some thought that the inspections have a value but couldn't say what impact these had; others thought they were expensive and of no value.

## We will

Write to all residents to advise of the proposed change and that more frequent statements are available on request. This will be reviewed after 2 years.

Reduce the number of issues from 4 to 2 per year (plus the Maintenance Mail and Annual Report).

Ask sheltered scheme residents about providing a few copies of the newsletter in their communal lounge rather than delivering a copy to every resident.

Trial the use of lighter paper so that it can be folded into smaller envelopes and save on the cost of postage.

Remove the information from the back of the letterhead and add an indicator on the front side that other formats and languages are available on request. Publish the information on a separate sheet to be enclosed with any correspondence, including application packs, to customers and residents whose first language may not be English.

Produce the annual report as a calendar and include residents' suggestions for improvements.

Ask each resident if they want to receive any future issues; and offer an electronic version.

Stop estate inspections from April 2017 – see page 13 for further details.

# What is Voluntary Right to Buy?



**The Government committed in the last General Election to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Housing associations offered to voluntarily work with the Government to make this happen so that it will allow us to replace the homes sold and protect certain, hard-to-replace homes from being sold.**

**When will Voluntary Right to Buy start?**

The start date for the national Voluntary Right to Buy scheme has not yet been confirmed.

The Government has said that there will be a regional pilot of Voluntary Right to Buy first.

**Hasn't Voluntary Right to Buy already started in some places?**

The Government worked with five housing associations to pilot Voluntary Right to Buy in limited locations to help inform the design and implementation of the main scheme. This pilot scheme is now closed to applications.

**Why is there another pilot scheme?**

The new pilot will test two important parts of the scheme that weren't tested in the original pilot, one-for-one replacement and portability – that is, in the event that a tenant cannot purchase their current home, the option to port their discount to an alternative property of their own or another willing housing association.

**When will the new pilot start?**

It is likely that the pilot will run in 2017/18. However, we're awaiting further details from the Government about where and when it will be start.

**If I'm eligible, will I be able to buy the home I'm living in now?**

Tenants who meet the Government's eligibility criteria will be entitled to a Voluntary Right to Buy discount and, in most cases, tenants will be able to use their discount to buy the home that they live in.

However, there may be cases where housing associations cannot sell that particular home. Each housing association will publish its individual policy outlining which homes would be sold and which wouldn't, and why, nearer the date of the scheme launch.

**Will Voluntary Right to Buy mean we lose social/affordable housing?**

A key part of housing associations' agreement with the Government is that, because they will get full compensation for each home they sell, they will replace every home sold with another affordable home and continue boosting the nation's housing supply. Last year, housing associations delivered 40% of all new homes in the country.

**How can I register my interest?**

You can register your interest on the Government's website, [www.righttobuy.gov.uk](http://www.righttobuy.gov.uk)

**Who can I speak to if I have any other questions about Voluntary Right to Buy?**

You can visit [www.righttobuy.gov.uk](http://www.righttobuy.gov.uk) to speak to one of the Government's Right to Buy Agents or to sign up for emails.

You can register your interest on the Government's website, [www.righttobuy.gov.uk](http://www.righttobuy.gov.uk)



## Amy's on the right track

**Three years of hard work have paid off for Amy Jones after she became the second apprentice to be permanently employed by Railway Housing Association.**

Soon after passing her NVQ Level 3 in Business Administration, 21-year-old Amy was given the good news that she was being offered a full-time job with us.

Based at our head office in Darlington, Amy is generally the first person you will talk to if you call, or pop into, the office.

Amy has also helped with the administration of events, including our annual residents' conference in York.

“I was absolutely delighted when I was told they wanted to keep me on”

She said: “I have really enjoyed my three years here but I knew there was no guarantee of a full-time job when my apprenticeship came to an end.

“So, I was absolutely delighted when I was told they wanted to keep me on permanently, it is awesome!

“I have learned so much while I have been here and I am now hoping to be able to get further qualifications in housing and progress within the Association.”

Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: “We started offering apprenticeships in 2010 and Amy is now the second person we have been able to offer a permanent role too.

“She is bright, hard-working and keen to learn new skills, so we are delighted to have been able to keep her on board at Railway.”



## Tracy award

**Another member of our staff, Tracy Comerford, has been rewarded for coming up with the suggestion of the year in our value for money suggestion scheme.**

Tracy's suggestion was to move to online subscriptions for Inside Housing magazine as this is a cheaper alternative. The magazine is provided to all board members and some members of the housing team, so during 2015/2016 this suggestion achieved the highest level of savings.

Tracy received £100 of high street vouchers for her suggestion.

If you have any suggestions on how we can get better value for money then please contact us on freephone 0800 0287428, email [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or write to the address shown on the back page.

“Tracy received £100 of high street vouchers for her suggestion.”





# Cats and dogs

Only those residents who live in homes that have direct access from their entrance door into their own individually fenced garden may keep a cat or dog.

A few months ago, we contacted 1,320 residents to find out if you think it would be practical to allow cats and dogs to be kept in other types of homes so long as residents clean up any mess, do not

allow dogs to roam free and do not allow their pet to cause a nuisance to neighbours. We said that if a substantial majority of residents agreed then we may change the policy for keeping pets.

449 residents replied to the survey - this is a high rate of response to a postal survey - and the results are shown below:

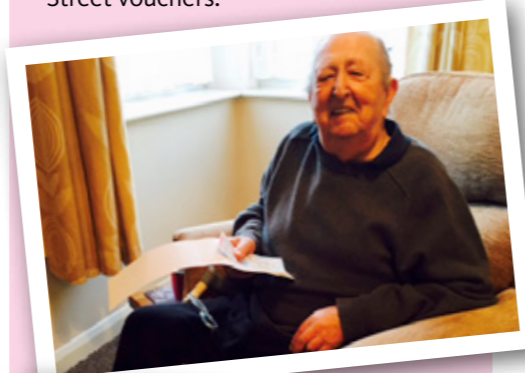
	YES	NO
Should residents who live in a house or bungalow without a private individually fenced garden be allowed to keep a dog or a cat?	44%	56%
Should residents who live in flats with their own entrance door that opens directly on to the outside be allowed to keep a dog or cat?	48%	52%
Should residents who live in flats with an entrance doorway that it is shared with other residents, and the communal entrance hall and stairs are not carpeted, be allowed to keep a dog or house cat?	33%	67%

We have listened to your views and in accordance with the wishes of the majority of residents, our policy will continue to be that dogs and cats may only be kept in those homes that have direct access from the entrance door into their own individually fenced garden.

# Survey winners

Since the last edition of RHA News there have been 3 winners of our quarterly Lettable Standard Survey.

They are Kenneth Button, of Patrick Stirling Court, Doncaster; Alison Hall of Mallard Court, Redcar and Robin Padget, of The Roundway, Hull. They all receive £25 worth of High Street vouchers.



# Estate inspections

At schemes with more than 6 homes we used to invite residents to join their Housing Officer on an estate inspection twice every year. However, this is very costly and there does not seem to be any need for the inspections.

1,229 residents were invited to join the estate inspections but only 75 residents did.

Every year it costs about £7,500 in staff time plus the printing and postage costs of sending 4 letters to 1,229 residents about the inspections.

1,229 residents were invited to join the estate inspections but only 75 residents did

Only a few minor external repairs and minor garden maintenance problems are noted during the inspections. These could easily be noticed and dealt with during other routine visits without the expense of carrying out a formal estate inspection.

We discussed the costs and benefits of the estate inspections with residents who attended the residents' conference last summer. They had mixed views - some thought that the inspections have a value but couldn't say what impact these had; others thought the inspections were expensive and of no value.

“ due to the cost and lack of value it has been decided to stop all estate inspections from April 2017 ”

We visit all estates as a matter of routine - stock condition surveys, visits to individual homes once every 2 years as a minimum, gas servicing visits every 12 months, weekly health and safety checks at sheltered schemes; and ad hoc visits for repairs and maintenance, re-letting of homes and tenancy matters. During these visits all staff - housing, maintenance and gas safety - are expected to note and report any external repairs, problems with garden maintenance, litter, graffiti, or any other problems.

So, due to the cost and lack of value it has been decided to stop all estate inspections from April 2017. This decision will be reviewed in 2 years to assess the impact. We will continue to visit each estate and homes regularly, as described above, and any problems will be noted and dealt with during these visits. The only exception to this is our scheme in Hereford, Great Western Court. The estate inspections at Great Western Court are attended by the majority of residents and are proving to be very useful so these will continue.

Please let us know what you think about this change to our services, by telephoning Freephone 0800 028 7428 or emailing [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or writing to Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington DL1 4DR.

# Rent update

From 2016, the government has required us to reduce most rents by 1% per year for the next four years, up to and including 2019/20.

The government delayed the rent cut for sheltered housing by one year but it will be made from 2017 for the next three years.

If your tenancy started before 1989, your rent is set by the Fair Rent Officer every two years. If the rent set by the Fair Rent Officer is lower than the social rent for your home then we will charge you the rent set by the Fair Rent Officer and the 1% cut will not apply.

For the vast majority of our residents, the 1% cut does not apply to the charges that are made for specific services like garden maintenance or window cleaning.

We will write to give you formal notice of any change to your rent, which for most residents will take place on 7 August 2017.

We will be consulting with residents who are members of our focus groups about our budget for 2017/18, including the changes to rents.

Our main source of income is from rents and it is used to provide and maintain good quality homes and services for residents.

# Pay 'Smart'

Do you know you can now pay your rent using your smart phone?

All you need to do is download the Allpay Payment App from the Apple App Store, Windows Phone Store or Google Play, depending on the type of phone you use you use.

# Involving residents

**We try to involve as many residents as possible in our work.**

This includes everything from one-off surveys through to being part of focus groups that meet to discuss changes to services, monitor our performance and

share views about the Association (see also the separate article on the next page about our Scrutiny Panel).  
In 2015/16, we offered the following opportunities for residents to get involved and influence the Association:



What?	How?	What happened in 2015/16?	How much?	Residents' opinions
Board Membership	Residents can apply to join the Board whenever there is a vacancy.	No Board members were residents.	Nil	
Scrutiny Panel	A small group of residents provide a 'critical independent minded friend' challenge.	Changes were made to how the Association handles complaints. Improvements were made to re-letting empty homes. The Panel influenced the content and design of the Annual Report. Panel members attended Board meetings. Panel members met with Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive.	£9,287 (the main cost is staff time to provide information and attend Panel meetings)	All members of the Panel are satisfied their views are listened to and changes have been made to how the Association works; and the majority think that the Panel works well.
Focus Groups	Residents meet to discuss changes to services, monitor our performance and share their views on the Association.	Influenced the design of the annual report. Approved an application for funding from the estate improvements budget. Chose winner of 2015 garden competition. Made changes to social value survey. Chose recipes and puzzles for RHA News.	£5,341	All Focus Group members are satisfied their views are listened to but 67% think the meetings need to improve to make a difference and achieve value for money.
Residents' Forum	Residents take part in surveys from the comfort of their own home.	2 surveys were carried out and resident's views influenced the design and content of the Maintenance Mail and the Annual report.	£912	The majority of members of the Residents' Forum are satisfied that their views are listened to, that changes have been made as a result of their involvement, and the Forum is effective.

continued

What?	How?	What happened in 2015/16?	How much?	Residents' opinions
Sheltered scheme residents' meetings	Twice yearly meetings are held to share information and listen to residents' views.	Residents decided on number and location of refuse bins, chose replacement carpets, agreed information to be provided on service charges, decided against buying extra washing machines, made applications to the estate improvements budget and community development budgets, decided against commercial cleaning of wheelie bins, chose fridge freezer for communal kitchen and replacement windows.	£5,473	
Annual conference	50 residents are invited to share information and express their views.	Residents told us what they think the Association's priorities should be for the next 5 years. Their views were considered by the Board of Trustees and included in the Business Plan for 2016-21.	£7,186	All of the residents were satisfied with the event.
One off surveys and meetings	Surveys and meetings are used to share information, seek residents' views on specific issues and to help improve services.	158 residents were consulted on the replacement of central heating boilers, windows, fire doors, carpets to communal areas, bathrooms, kitchens and fire detection equipment. Residents chose the internal colour of window frames, style of window handles, colour and type of carpets, style of kitchen units and handles, worktops, bathroom tiles and floor coverings.	£4,462	

## Scrutiny Panel

**Over the last year, our residents' Scrutiny Panel looked at how we involve residents in the management of their homes.**

The Panel was satisfied with the range of opportunities for involvement that are available to residents and that these are cost effective.

The Panel was concerned about the lack of younger residents taking part in resident involvement activities and recommended that we carry out a survey of all residents aged under 60 years to find out why this is.

The Panel also recommended that the frequency of the satisfaction survey of all residents is reduced from

once every two years to once every three years. This will save £7,000 over six years.

The Scrutiny Panel is now examining how we deal with complaints of anti-social behaviour and disputes between neighbours. Their findings will be reported in a future issue of the newsletter.

Five residents have recently applied to join the Scrutiny Panel. If you are also interested in joining the Panel please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or at [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington DL1 4DR.



# Complaints

How we compare to other landlords	Railway Housing Association	Other similar landlords
Complainants satisfied with how we dealt with their complaint.	100%	58%
Complainants satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.	75%	54%
Complaints resolved at earliest stage.	88%	89%

**In 2015/16 we received 24 complaints about our services. This was less than previous years and less than other similar landlords.**

Most complaints (19 of the 24) were about repairs and maintenance. This is the case for most landlords. Although we strive to provide a high-quality maintenance service that meets residents' expectations sometimes things do go wrong.

However, we carried out 3,728 repairs as well as £1.3 million worth of major improvements in 2015/16 and the vast majority of residents were satisfied with our service.

No changes have been made to policies or procedures as a result of complaints received in 2015/16.

# Disputes

23 neighbour disputes were reported to us in 2015/16

Reason for neighbour dispute	Number
Noise	15
Disagreements/verbal abuse	3
Pets	1
Drugs related	1
Alcohol related	1
Litter	1

Action taken to deal with neighbour dispute	Number
Informal warning	10
Legal proceedings to end tenancy	1

The cost of managing neighbour disputes was £16.39 per property in 2015/16. This is much lower than the average of £35.60 for other similar landlords and reflects the low number of cases reported.

Noise is also most the reported problem to other similar landlords.



86% of respondents were satisfied with how their case was handled

89% of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their case



**Since the last edition of RHA News we have welcomed two new Board members and appointed the first female Chairperson in our 98-year history.**

Berni Whitaker took over as Chair after Geoff Proudlock completed his maximum term of office for Board members.

Berni, who works for Sunderland City Council as Enterprise Manager, has spent most of her professional career working in economic development and regeneration. She also has significant housing board member experience.

Our two new Board members are June Grimes and Stuart Blackett.

June, who was Regional Director of Crisis, the homeless charity, before

retiring, also has extensive experience in the social housing sector, having worked for several large housing associations.

She said: "I hope to use my experience in social housing, the third sector and in regional business to help the Association to continue to drive forward in the coming years."

Joining Railway is a bit like a busman's holiday for Stuart because in his day job he helps to administer pensions for former railway workers.

Stuart is Director of Finance & Strategy of pension administration company RPMI. This includes looking after the Railway Pension Scheme.

He said: "I'm a chartered accountant and have been in finance for 20 years so I am hoping my skills will be useful

in ensuring Railway Housing Association continues to be a well governed and financially viable organisation."

Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands said: "These are very challenging times for the social housing sector and our residents, with welfare benefit reforms, rent decreases and the planned Right to Buy scheme all having an impact.

"But we are confident that by having people like Berni, June and Stuart, supported by the rest of our excellent board and staff team, we will be able to meet these challenges whilst at the same time improving our services and providing new homes during the current difficult economic times."



Far left: Berni Whitaker

Left: June Grimes

Below: Stuart Blackett






# Our Performance

We constantly monitor and measure our performance to make sure that we are keeping to our promise to offer high quality services to our customers.

## How we performed from 1st April 2016 to 30th June 2016

<b>Income Management</b> Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.98% (target is 1.90%) 	<b>Complaints</b> Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%) 
<b>Lettings</b> Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 65.58% (target 58%) 	<b>Repairs and Maintenance</b> Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 96% (target is 97%)  Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 79% (target is 86%)  Percentage of repairs completed on time – 99% (target is 99%)  Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 87% (target is 85%) 
<b>Response to Letters</b> Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 90% (target is 98%) 	<b>Value for Money</b> Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 4.59% (target is 5%) 
<b>Estate Inspections</b> Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months – 95.7% (target is 85%) 	

 **Green**  
 Performance on target  
 **Amber**  
 Performance below but close to target  
 **Red**  
 Action is needed to meet target

## How we performed from 1st July 2016 to 30th September 2016

<b>Income Management</b> Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.69% (target is 1.90) 	<b>Complaints</b> Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%) 
<b>Lettings</b> Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 67.3% (target 58%) 	<b>Repairs and Maintenance</b> Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 97% (target is 97%)  Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 87% (target is 86%)  Percentage of repairs completed on time – 99% (target is 99%)  Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 88% (target is 85%) 
<b>Response to Letters</b> Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 94% (target is 98%) 	<b>Value for Money</b> Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 4.7% (target is 5%) 
<b>Estate Inspections</b> Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months – 98% (target is 85%) 	



## Recipe: Fruit & Nut Pudding Loaf

Prep time: **45 minutes**  
 Cooking time: **2hrs 10 mins**  
 Plus overnight soaking  
 Difficulty level: **Easy Freezable**

### Ingredients

- 400g dried mixed fruit
- 85g glacé cherry
- 1 Bramley apple, about 175g, grated, plus zest 1 orange and 1 lemon
- 150ml good apple juice
- 2 tbsp brandy 2 tbsp Cointreau (or use more brandy)
- 140g butter, plus extra for greasing 100g dark muscovado sugar
- 2 large eggs, beaten 85g self-raising flour
- 100g white breadcrumbs 2 tbsp golden syrup

- 2 tsp mixed spice 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 25g toasted hazelnut, pecan nuts and blanched almonds, roughly

### For the topping

- 50g butter
- 50g dark muscovado sugar
- 1 tbsp golden syrup
- 1 tbsp brandy
- 25g each toasted hazelnuts, pecan nuts, blanched almonds and glacé cherry, leftwhole icing sugar, for dusting (optional)



**Per serving:** Carbs: 94g  
 Kcal: 722 Sugar: 75g  
 Saturates: 14g Fat: 35g  
 Protein: 9g Salt: 1.22g  
 Fibre: 4g

1. Put the dried fruit, cherries, apple, zests, apple juice, brandy and Cointreau in a large bowl. Microwave on High for 1 min, then leave to soak overnight.
2. Butter and line a 2lb loaf tin with a strip of non-stick baking paper. Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Put the kettle on to boil and have a roasting tin, plus a sheet of buttered foil, ready.
3. Beat the butter and sugar together until it turns a little paler, then stir in the eggs, flour, breadcrumbs, syrup, spices, salt, soaked fruit and the nuts. Spoon into the loaf tin and smooth the top. Scrunch the foil loosely over the tin, twisting corners to tighten it around the tin's edges. Sit it in the roasting tin, then pour in a few cms of boiling water. Carefully transfer to the oven and bake for 40 mins.
4. After 40 mins, turn down the oven to 160C/140C fan/gas 3 and cook for another 1 1/2 hours, topping up the water level every now and again.
5. To reheat the pudding, either return it to a medium oven for 30 mins in its tin, or turn out onto a serving plate, cover loosely with cling film and microwave for 5 mins.



Find and circle all of the Trees that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Greek Proverb. Please cut out and return your completed puzzle to the address at the bottom of this page, remembering to include your name, address and contact number.

- |              |              |             |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| APPLE        | ELM          | PECAN       |
| APRICOT      | FIR          | PLUM        |
| ASH          | GINKGO       | PINE        |
| ASPEN        | GOLDENRAIN   | POPLAR      |
| ARBORVITAE   | HAZELNUT     | REDBUD      |
| BALD CYPRESS | HEMLOCK      | RUBBER TREE |
| BEECH        | HICKORY      | SEQUOIA     |
| BIRCH        | LARCH        | SPRUCE      |
| BOXWOOD      | LINDEN       | SYCAMORE    |
| BUCKEYE      | LONDON PLANE | TULIPTREE   |
| BUTTERNUT    | MAPLE        | WALNUT      |
| CATALPA      | NECTARINE    | WITCHHAZEL  |
| CEDAR        | OAK          | WILLOW      |
| CHERRY       | PALM         | YELLOWWOOD  |
| CHESTNUT     | PEACH        |             |
| COTTONWOOD   | PEAR         |             |

B G O L D E N R A I N A S O B C M L E  
 I I D T T E E T S C Y T G L U R O P H  
 W S R O G U R R A P U E E A T T I H S  
 W H B C O E N T T L R Z N L T N O E A  
 P L A I H W A L I R A U O D E M N M Y  
 O E L R N L X P E H E N C H R P A L R  
 P L D P P H T O H Z D B C E N A C O R  
 L N C A T R I C B O A E B T U T E C E  
 A C Y A E N T C N R E H E U T R P K H  
 R E P E R I E P K B E S D N R W I H C  
 O D R P W B L D O O W N O T T O C F R  
 S A E E A A O S N E R H O S H A D E E  
 P R S T N L H R R I K Y W E E C D Y T  
 L K S E N O M O V A L W W H T B A U H  
 U E E L P A M Y O I S H O C U P N E A  
 M E N I R A T C E N T L L D P L L N P  
 P E A R C O G K N I G A L L A S P E N  
 E V E Y W I L L O W R S E W L A R C H  
 I T S S E Q U O I A I E Y E K C U B N

