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# Making a difference – Residents’ Scrutiny Panel



Since 2011 a small group of residents has made improvements to the way that we deal with:-

- Repairs
- Buying goods and services
- The condition of homes before re-letting
- How homes are re-let
- Complaints
- Involving residents in the running of the association
- Neighbour disputes
- Garden maintenance and cleaning services.

If you want to have your say, meet new people, influence future plans and really make a difference, please contact us on Freephone 0800 0287428 or email [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk)

## Protecting your personal information

New laws to protect your personal information came into effect in May 2018.

This doesn't change how we use your personal information but if you would like to find out more about how we use and protect it or about your rights, our privacy notice and our data protection policy are available on our website [www.railwayha.co.uk](http://www.railwayha.co.uk) or please contact us if you would like a printed copy of either of these.

**Have you changed any contact information?**  
If you have changed your telephone or emergency contact numbers, please inform us of these changes as soon as possible.

## Help with heating bills

If you were born before 5th November 1953, you are entitled to a winter fuel payment of between £100 and £300 depending on your circumstances.

If you are not getting a social security benefit (or if you only get Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit), you will need to claim the money by telephone or post.

Call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0800 731 0160

Textphone: 0800 731 0464

NGT text relay (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 731 0160

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

**You will need to know:-**

- your National Insurance number
- your bank or building society details
- the date you were married or entered into a civil partnership (if appropriate)

**YOU ARE ENTITLED TO A WINTER FUEL PAYMENT OF BETWEEN £100 AND £300**

You'll also need to say whether during the qualifying week of 17 to 23 September 2018 you were –

- in hospital getting free in-patient treatment
- in a residential care home
- in custody serving a court sentence.

To claim by post download a form or apply online –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/winter-fuel-payment-claim-form>



Denise Atkinson (left) with Andrea Abbott, Director of Customer Services

## Gardening competition

“It’s lovely to know that other Railway Housing Association residents chose my garden to be the winner”

**Denise Atkinson is the winner of our 2018 gardening competition.**

In a record year for entries, the garden of 54-year-old Denise Atkinson in Ferryhill, County Durham, was chosen as the winner by residents who are members of our Focus Groups and Residents’ Forum.

Denise, who receives a trophy, flowers and £50 worth of vouchers, credited one of the hottest summers on record as the reason why her garden looked so good.

She said: “The warm weather really helped to prolong the life of the garden this year; I even had flowers still blooming in November.”

Mobile hairdresser Denise says she spends an average of 15 hours a week

in her garden at the height of the gardening season.

She adds: “I plan out in my head how I want my garden to look and then it’s just a case of staying on top of everything, including watering and weeding.

“It’s my only real hobby outside of work and spending time with my children and grand-children and the summer of 2018 made it even nicer.

“It’s lovely to know that other Railway Housing Association residents chose my garden to be the winner; I am honoured.”

When asked for her gardening tips, Denise says: “The end of the year is the best time to visit your local garden centre because there are so many bargains to be had.

“You can buy things at a fraction of the price they will be in the spring and summer and it means you have a head start when the growing season gets underway.”

Andrea Abbott, Railway Housing Association’s Director of Customer Services, said: “I was amazed when I visited Denise’s home in winter 2018 that there was still so much colour in her garden.

“She obviously works very hard in her garden and is a deserving winner.”

If you think you can beat Denise’s garden, why not enter our 2019 gardening competition (see the enclosed leaflet for entry details).

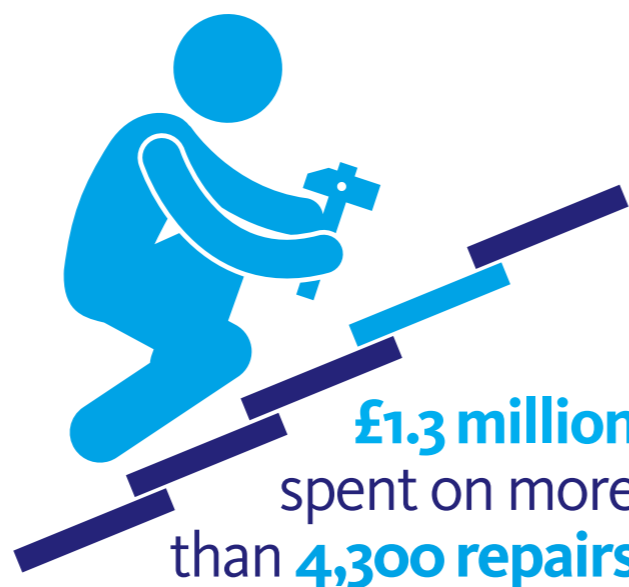




Over **£800,000** spent on improving homes



992 gas services carried out



**£1.3 million** spent on more than **4,300 repairs**

2017-18 in

# Numbers

137 homes re-let



Only **19 complaints** about neighbours – fewer than other landlords

- Over **1,400** residents
- Garden maintenance service provided at **97 schemes**
- **Cleaning service** provided for communal areas in apartments
- Only **24 complaints** about our services - fewer than other landlords
- **No changes** were made to our services as a result of complaints
- **13 compliments** received about the garden maintenance service, residents' away day, customer service, repairs and new homes
- Most **neighbour complaints** were about noise and/or verbal abuse
- Most **neighbour complaints** were resolved by visiting both parties to discuss the problem
- **6 residents** were warned about their behaviour
- **1 resident** received a legal notice about their behaviour
- **1 resident** was evicted from their home for anti-social behaviour



**91%** of complaints were upheld

## A good neighbour

**A man who ensured his friend's dying days were as comfortable as possible was the overwhelming winner of our 2018 Good Neighbour of the Year Award.**

Rick Yardley, 67, who lives in our Great Western Court sheltered housing scheme in Hereford, was nominated by several of his neighbours

They included Lillian Davies, who said: "Rick's friend Hiram fought a long battle with cancer and rather than die in a hospice he wanted to be in his own home, so Rick looked after his daily needs, doing his shopping and being the liaison between the medical and Macmillan nursing staff.

"This enabled Hiram to fulfil his wish of spending his last few months with his friends in his own home."

As well as being there for Hiram, Rick uses his expertise as a former council gardener to help the Great Western Court gardening club to prepare seedlings and plants for the communal gardens.

He also helps to post mail for neighbours who are unable to get to the post box and even sought out a special kind of breakfast cereal for a resident who was struggling to locate it.

Marion Jones, who also nominated Rick, said: "During the bad weather earlier in 2018 many of the residents were unable to get out so Rick did the shopping for everyone. At one point he carried 22 pints of milk back; he is wonderful."

This year's good neighbour was once again chosen by our residents, through our Resident Forum and Focus Groups.

Rick received a trophy and a cheque for £50 at our residents' conference in York. This year's good neighbour of the year competition was sponsored by Brabners, who are solicitors for the Association.

Rick said: "The award came as complete surprise to me and I feel a little embarrassed as I don't think what I do is anything special.

"I was brought up to help people so that's just me, but it is lovely to win the award, especially when the people who nominated me were my friends and neighbours; that makes it even nicer."

If you have a neighbour you think is deserving of recognition, please fill out and return the 2019 good neighbour of the year entry form which is included with this newsletter.

“The award came as complete surprise to me”



Rick Yardley with two of the people who nominates him, Marion Jones (seated left) and Lillian Davies (seated right). At the back are Anne Rowlands (left), Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, and Berni Whittaker, Chair of the Association.



# A grand day out

**Resident involvement was the order of the day at our 'grand day out' in York in June 2018.**

We were pleased to welcome 49 residents, including many new faces, to our annual gathering at the Marriott Hotel.

The theme of the day was involving residents and led by our facilitator, Jackie Grannell from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), we asked attendees to help us shape the future of resident involvement in the management of the association.

This involved a number of exercises, including looking at what resident involvement means and what are the barriers to becoming involved.

This then led to residents designing their own leaflet to publicise resident involvement and suggesting ways of encouraging more residents to be involved. These included using the newsletter and social media to engage with more residents and feature residents who are currently involved; and promoting it to new residents a few months after they have settled into their new home.

All attendees said that they had enjoyed the day, with 47% rating it as excellent, 44% as very good and 9% as good.

“ Good fun, great ideas ”



Sue Arrowsmith, our Housing and Lettings Coordinator, receives her award from Anne Rowlands and Berni Whittaker.



Above: Raffle winners Mr Dempsey and Ms Patrizi.

After a lovely lunch and a chance for residents to ask questions of our team in the quick query clinic the fun began with our annual quiz. This was followed by a raffle with a first prize of a night at the Marriott, won by Mr Dempsey and Ms Patrizi from Sunderland.

As well as our good neighbour of the year award (see page 5), we also presented our award for the best value for money suggestion received from residents and staff in 2017/18. This went to Sue Arrowsmith, our Housing & Lettings Coordinator, for her suggestion of using a national database for energy performance certificates for our properties, which resulted in savings of £1,650.

Details of our 2019 event are included in a flyer sent with this newsletter. We hope to see even more new faces this year!



“ Gave opportunity for everyone to have their day ”





# A model development

**Our new £8 million affordable housing scheme close to the historic 1825 Darlington to Stockton Railway Line was recently described as a “model development” by Shadow Housing Minister John Healey.**

Mr Healey commented after visiting the 73-home scheme – which consists of two and three-bedroom houses, two-bedroom bungalows and one-bedroom apartments - in Darlington recently.

He said: It's very rare that new bungalows are built even though there is a big demand for them, so it's nice to see that Railway Housing Association have created this new development with different sections of the community in mind.

“It's a model development and it's pleasing we have housing associations like this building not just new homes, but new communities as well.”

The centrepiece of the development is the converted listed engine shed built in 1844 which has been transformed into seven two-storey homes

New residents include former railwayman Arthur Denham. The 83-year-old used to pay 1p a week from his wages into the North Eastern Cottage Homes and Benefit Fund (the forerunner to the Railway Housing Association Benefit Fund) which was set up after the First World War to help pay for homes for railwaymen and their families.

“It's also nice to know that in a roundabout way, the donations I made when I was working have helped to build lovely homes like this.”

”

Arthur, who has moved into a bungalow with his partner Jean, said: “It's also nice to know that in a roundabout way, the donations I made when I was working have helped to build lovely homes like this.”

Also settling in are architects Weronika and Hakam Kharsa and their twin girls Jasmine and Sadeel.

They have moved into one of the two-bedroom homes.

The couple said: “As architects we can see and appreciate the work which has gone into designing these homes and making sure they reflect the railway heritage. We couldn't be happier with our new home.”



Above: Arthur Denham and his partner Jean with Anne Rowlands and Peter Elliot, from Tolent. Right: Weronika and Hakam Kharsa and their daughters



Right: Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands (far right) speaking with John Healey and Darlington MP Jenny Chapman.





# Still growing

**Green-fingered residents living in one of our sheltered housing scheme have been given reason to celebrate.**

The Growing Point Garden Club at Great Western Court in Hereford was named 2018 Gardeners Group of the Year.

The cup was presented by Mr Nat Hone, High Sheriff of Herefordshire, and the ladies who attended the show were delighted to accept it and bring it home to the Court to display.

GWC Growing Point Garden Club is now in its 3rd year and runs under

the tutorship of Felicity Weeks from Holme Lacey Agricultural College Growing Point Project.

“**come along and learn how to take cuttings, plant and grow on seeds, learn about different species**”

The Club's initial first year start-up was sponsored by our community development fund and has grown from strength to strength. The Club has continued with a monthly group session for both residents and non-residents to come along and learn how to take cuttings, plant and grow on seeds, learn about different species through quizzes and take part in season related craft work such as making corn dollies, valentines gifts and palm crosses.

Most of the things grown are shared with all of the residents of Great Western Court as they are planted in the communal gardens for all to enjoy!



Great Western Court Growing Point Garden Club members with their trophy.

# Happy memories

**Our Hackworth Court sheltered housing scheme in Stockton holds lots of special memories for Carol Whiteley – and now she gets to relive those memories every single day.**

In March 1968, Carol and her husband John held their wedding reception in a room in the old Stockton Railway Station.

Fast forward 50 years later and Carol is now living in a flat just yards away from where she and John toasted their nuptials.

That's because Hackworth Court is the converted Stockton railway station.

Carol recalls: "John and I were married in the Baptist church on Wellington Street and the station had a function room and was close by so we decided to hold our reception there."

"It was a great day so to now be living here 50 years later is lovely."

John unfortunately did not get to return to the 'station' with Carol, having died in 2011 following a brave battle (he was given three months to live and managed three months, three months) against cancer.

Their 36-year-old daughter, Alison, also sadly passed away last year following complications caused by a spinal injury, however her memory lives on with Carol at Hackworth Court.

Carol explains: "Alison and I were living in our family home in Billingham and we were getting ready to move into a bungalow when she died."

"I then applied to move to Hackworth Court and was invited to view the flat I am living in now."

"Clare, the tenancy services officer, left me alone in the living room and I noticed that the glass door which leads in to the kitchen had stencils of butterflies on it."

"Alison loved butterflies and this made me feel immediately at home, so I moved into the flat in 2017 – I think both her and John are together looking down at me living in a place with so many happy memories."



“**It was a great day so to now be living here 50 years later is lovely.**”





## Meet Andy

Many of you will already have met Andy Dye, our new gas servicing engineer.

Andy's role involves visiting properties to carry out annual gas safety checks on boilers and heating systems to ensure they are safe to use.

He said: "It's a job I am enjoying - it's good to meet lots of different people and to make sure their homes are safe."

## Beware of the sharks



The England Illegal Money Lending Team investigates and prosecutes illegal money lenders while supporting those who have borrowed money from a loan shark.

Loan sharks are likely to offer you a cash loan, not provide paperwork, add huge amounts of interest or APR to your loan, threaten you, or take your bank card/benefit card.

If you are worried that this has happened to you, or someone you know, please contact the Team on 0300 555 2222 to safely report a loan shark. You can also visit [www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk) for further information.

## Meet Tracy

In the latest of our series looking at the people who make Railway Housing Association tick we speak to Tracy Comerford, our Senior Finance Assistant.

Whether it's a few pounds, or hundreds of thousands of pounds, we can always count on Tracy Comerford to get it right.

As our Senior Finance Assistant Tracy plays an important role in helping to manage the finances of Railway Housing Association, whether it's paying staff, suppliers or generally just ensuring the books are balanced.

She also makes sure that we have everything we need to run smoothly, whether that's buying sticky tape for the office, a vacuum for a sheltered housing scheme or paying a contractor for building new homes.

It's a job 39-year-old Tracy has made her own having joined us in 1998 when she was 19.

A lot has changed at work and home (two children to be exact) since then.

“When I first started, we had two shared computers, and no-one had email then.”

Tracy says: "When I first started, we had two shared computers, and no-one had email then.

"I used to have to stamp all our residents' rent books by hand before they were posted out; and now everything is done on the computer."

Despite being at Railway for 20 years, Tracy is certainly not resting on her laurels.



“I enjoy working here; Railway have always been very supportive and flexible, ensuring you get a good work/life balance which is important.”

A few years ago, she returned to school to improve her GCSE maths grade and recently she successfully completed a Chartered Institute of Housing course in Housing Practice.

She adds: "The course gave me a wider understanding of the other areas of housing, which I am finding very useful.

"I enjoy working here; Railway have always been very supportive and flexible, ensuring you get a good work/life balance which is important."

When's she not at work, Tracy enjoys spending time with her children, which has also led to a new hobby, roller skating.

She says: "I joke that I only do it with my kids but there are a few of us roller skating mums who wouldn't mind putting on the skates whether the children were there or not!"

# 100th Anniversary

We are delighted to now be in our 100th anniversary year.

To mark our centenary we have a number of things planned and we hope to involve as many residents as possible.

The highlight of the celebrations will take place in June when, thanks to a partnership with Darlington Building Society, we will be having an afternoon tea experience onboard an old, restored railway carriage on the amazing Wensleydale Railway tourist and heritage line.

The carriage will be pulled by the Tornado, a coal-fired steam locomotive built in Darlington, so given our railway heritage this will be a very fitting way to mark our 100th birthday.

In December, you should have received a leaflet inviting you to enter a prize draw to join us for afternoon tea.

Also in 2019, we will be producing, again thanks to sponsorship from a local marketing company, a 100th anniversary beer. This will be brewed by a small independent brewery in the North East and will reflect the beer drank in 1919. It is our intention to provide a bottle of beer to as many residents as possible

during the year, either at events like our residents' conference or through competitions in publications like RHA News and Maintenance Mail.

People living in our sheltered housing schemes are being invited to hold centenary parties, sponsored by our maintenance contractors and suppliers. At the end of the year we will be producing a special edition newsletter about all of these special events and also looking back over 100 years of Railway Housing Association.

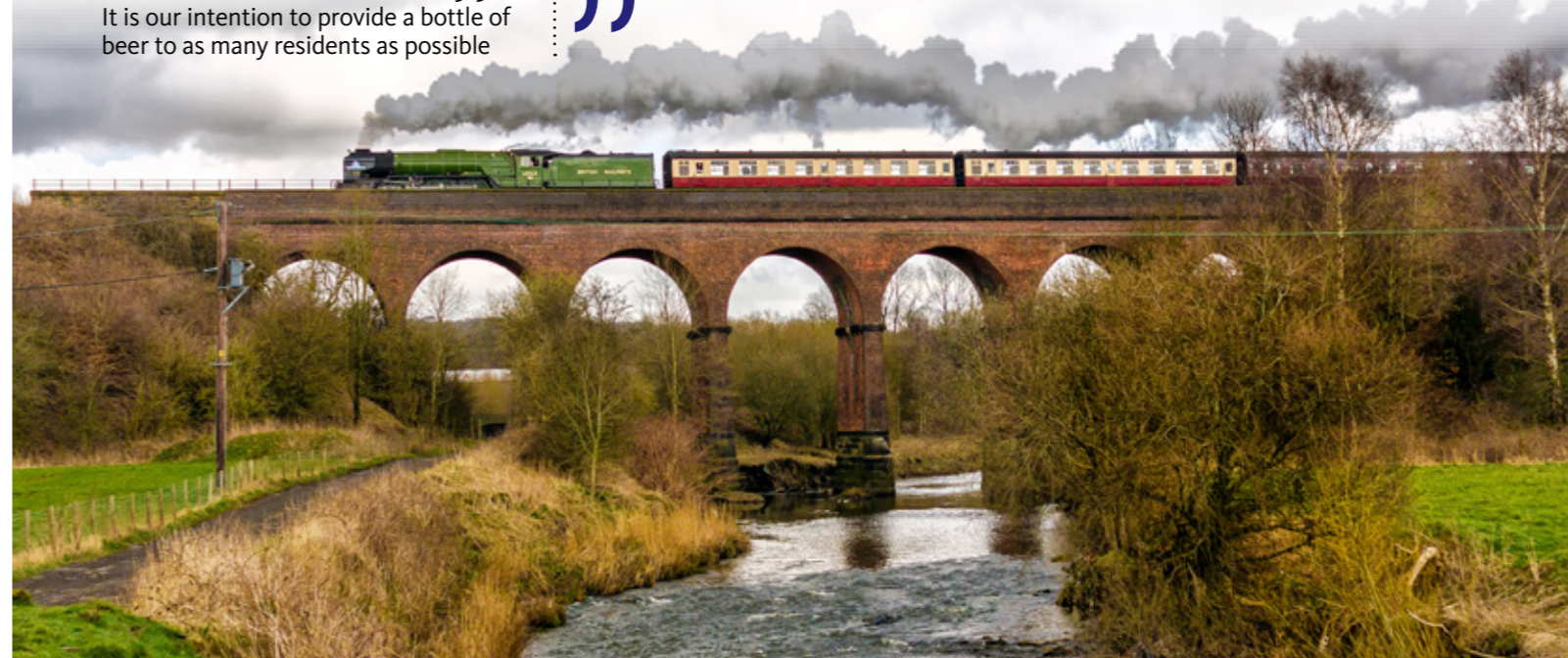
“It promises to be a fantastic year of celebration and we look forward to sharing this with as many of our residents as possible.”



To kick the year off, you will also be able to display, if you wish, our annual report calendar, which has some lovely photographs of the old railway tourism posters you used to see advertising places like Scarborough, Harrogate, Ilkley and Bridlington.

It promises to be a fantastic year of celebration and we look forward to sharing this with as many of our residents as possible.

**Darlington**  
Building Society





# Satisfaction survey

92% of residents are satisfied with the overall quality of their homes

We would like to thank everyone who completed and returned a survey designed to gauge residents' satisfaction with Railway Housing Association and the services we provide. Here's a summary:-

- 91% of residents are satisfied with the service they receive (the research average is 83%), with 5% dissatisfied
- 92% of residents are satisfied with the overall quality of their home (the research average is 84%), with 5% dissatisfied
- 93% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live (the research average is 83%), with 5% dissatisfied
- 94% of residents are satisfied that they receive value for money (the research average is 83%), with 2% dissatisfied
- 86% of residents are satisfied with the Association's repairs and maintenance service (the research average is 78%), with 8% dissatisfied
- 88% think that the association is good at keeping them informed, with 5% dissatisfied

93% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

Residents were invited to provide comments about the services they receive from Railway Housing Association and comments included:

"I have lived here for 20 years and never felt I wanted to go elsewhere."

"Railway Housing want the best for their tenants."

"Railway provides very good services, they are friendly, and my bungalow is lovely."

The independent research company that carried out the survey, BMG Research didn't find any service areas that need improving. However, satisfaction levels were slightly lower in York and the East Riding so the reasons for dissatisfaction given by residents who live in these areas is now being looked at in more detail and we will aim to address any problems.



94% of residents are satisfied that they receive value for money

Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: "We strive continuously to improve the services we provide to tenants and it's pleasing to see such high levels of satisfaction among the people who live in our homes.

"It's important that we keep improving further and we will be taking on board everything that was raised by our residents and seeking to increase any lower levels of satisfaction by the time of the next survey in 2021.

## How we have performed from: 1 January 2018 to 31 March 2018

### Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.82% (target is 2%)



### Lettings

Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 59.9% (target 70%)  
*Properties that took more than 25 days to re-let either needed major repairs, did not have a waiting list or time had to be allowed for the local authority to nominate an applicant from their waiting list.*



### Response to Letters

Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 94% (target is 98%)



### Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 74% (target is 87%)  
*17 of 23 complaints were resolved at the first stage.*



### Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 97% (target is 97%)



Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 87% (target is 87%)



Percentage of repairs completed on time – 95% (target is 99%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 84% (target is 85%)



### Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 7.08% (target is 5%).



## How we have performed from: 1 April 2018 to 30 June 2018

### Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.75% (target is 2%)



### Lettings

Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 50% (target 70%)  
*Properties that took more than 25 days to re-let either needed major repairs, did not have a waiting list or time had to be allowed for the local authority to nominate an applicant from their waiting list.*



### Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 88% (target is 87%)



### Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 99% (target is 97%)



### Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 9.98% (target is 5%).



**Green**  
Performance on target



**Amber**  
Performance below but close to target



**Red**  
Action is needed to meet target





## Recipe: Fat free (almost) tea loaf



### Ingredients

- 280g (10 oz) raisins
- 300ml (10 fl oz) strong hot tea
- 340g (12 oz) self-raising flour
- 110g (4 oz) sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 egg, beaten

Serves: 6

1. Preheat the oven to 180 C / Gas 4. Steep the raisins in the hot tea for half an hour.
2. Mix dry ingredients together. Add the raisin-tea mixture and the beaten egg. Gently combine using a rubber spatula, but don't overmix.
3. Scoop ingredients into an oiled loaf tin.
4. Bake at 180 C / Gas 4 for 1 hour.



## Word Search Holidays

Please cut out and return your completed word search to the address at the bottom of this page, remembering to include your name, address and contact number.

- |             |          |        |
|-------------|----------|--------|
| SIGHTSEEING | MOTORWAY | SUMMER |
| RELAXATION  | AIRPORT  | TRAIN  |
| AEROPLANE   | LUGGAGE  | HOTEL  |
| HOLIDAYS    | TICKETS  | BEACH  |
| SUITCASE    | SEASIDE  | MONEY  |
| PASSPORT    | CARAVAN  | COACH  |
| CAMPSITE    | TRAVEL   | TENT   |
| TOURISTS    | ABROAD   | SAND   |

## Crossword winner

The winner, and receiving £25, of the crossword competition in the last edition of RHA News is Mrs Alder, from Davidson Cottages, Newcastle.

## Survey winners

The winners of our quarterly lettable standard survey, and receiving £25, is Mrs Ryan, from North Eastern Court, and Mrs Kitching, from Stephenson Court.

K	S	Y	A	D	I	L	O	H	A	M	A	X	K	B	E	A	C	H	C
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