

Another fine housing scheme...

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A challenging time

I want to begin this edition of RHA News by thanking you all for the amazing patience and understanding you have shown throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

It would be a massive understatement to say 2020 and the first few months of 2021 were difficult and very challenging indeed.

At the start of 2020, no-one could have predicted the world would effectively come to a standstill because of a global pandemic.

Tens of thousands of people have died from Covid-19 in the UK alone and our thoughts go out to all those who have lost loved ones due to this awful virus.

We have also seen the closure of shops, pubs restaurants, hotels, and offices, as well as having to observe strict social distancing measures to try to slow the spread of the virus.

Many of you also had to self-isolate or shield, not being able to see your family or friends, which we know must have been extremely difficult.

Like every organisation in the country, Railway Housing Association has also had to adapt. We closed our offices in March 2020 and the majority of staff are still working from home and will continue to do so, at least for the foreseeable future.

Initially, we had to focus on emergency repairs and essential work only, such as gas safety checks, but thankfully we are now also carrying out regular maintenance and continuing to build new homes, as you will see later in the newsletter.

With the vast majority of our residents now having had at least one of their two vaccines, and with the nationwide vaccination programme continuing apace, hopefully we are now over the worst of the pandemic and with the easing of restrictions it will provide us with even more of the freedoms we used to take for granted.

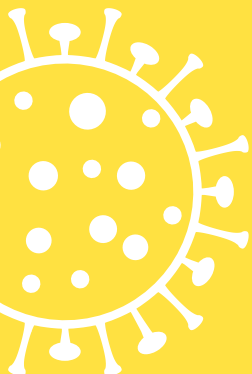
Please do however continue to stay safe, follow the latest Government guidance and the tips listed on page 8 of this newsletter.

Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive

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hopefully we are now over the worst of the pandemic and with the easing of restrictions it will provide us with even more of the freedoms we used to take for granted.

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Grabbing the bull by the horns

A call from a resident to report divots caused by an escaped bull is not something that occurs every day, but this is exactly what happened at one of our properties.

Catherine Hirst was returning to her home in Knaresborough after a day at work and was just about to get out of her car when she saw a giant bull outside her back door.

Wisely, she chose to remain in her car while she pondered her options.

Catherine, who works for North Yorkshire County Council, thought about making a run for the front door, but remembered she did not have that particular key with her.

After 15 minutes, with darkness descending and no sign of the bull moving, it looked like a long stay in her car lay ahead.

Thankfully, the bull eventually became bored, having had a good trample on Catherine's lawn, and walked away.

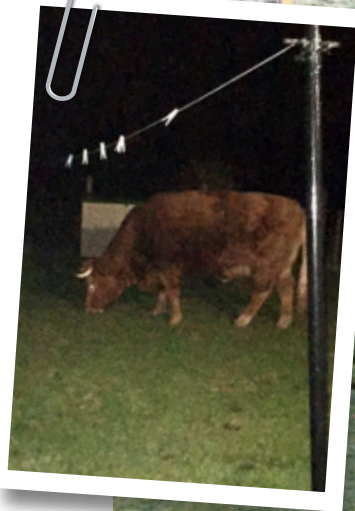
Catherine then quickly ran into her house just in case he decided to come back. He didn't, but he did leave "hundreds" of divots in the grass.

She says: "I had seen the bull before because it is in a paddock behind the house and it always seemed to follow two horses around which were also in the paddock.

"But it's fair to say I was surprised when I got home from work to find him alone in front of my house.

"He's a big fella so I didn't think getting out of my car was a good idea and thankfully he got bored and walked away so I could get into my house.

"With everything that has been going on, I just had to laugh!"



“He’s a big fella so I didn’t think getting out of my car was a good idea and thankfully he got bored and walked away”

Development news...

King James School, Bishop Auckland

Work is now well underway on the £5.2 million redevelopment of a rundown old school which was once attended by comedy legend Stan Laurel.

We are building 28 affordable homes for rent on the site of the old King James School at Bishop Auckland.

This includes the sympathetic restoration of the front of the main Grade II listed building - often referred to as the Laurel Building after the school's most famous former popular pupil - which was badly damaged in a fire in 2007.

The building is being converted into 12 two-bedroom apartments with a further 16 two-bedroom bungalows being built at the rear, in a cul-de-sac layout. All the homes will be let to older people.

Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: "When completed, it will provide much-needed high quality, energy efficient two-bedroom older person's accommodation in the town.

"In addition, it will transform what has become a very rundown site on the main road in and out of Bishop Auckland into an attractive development."

As part of the planning conditions, we will be retaining the western façade of the building which fronts onto South Church Road. This part of the building dates back to 1875.

Although the rest of the building will need to be demolished, due to its poor and unstable condition, we are using materials in keeping with its history, including a Victorian-style tiled roof.

Anne added: "It's a building with lots of history and the fact Stan Laurel attended school there illustrates its importance as a local landmark.

"We are therefore mindful of the history and significance of the King James School site and our scheme will ensure we preserve a key element of the historic part of the building."

The total cost of the development, which is expected to be complete in June 2022, is £5.2 million which includes a grant of £1.1 million from Homes England.

Stan Laurel attended King James School as a boarder between 1902 and 1903.

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It's a building with lots of history and the fact Stan Laurel attended school there illustrates its importance

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Left to right: Norman Clark, Railway Housing Association Project Manager, Anne Rowlands, and Wayne Harris, T Manners Construction Director.



Barton Street, Darlington

Residents have moved into their homes at our newest £2.4 million affordable housing development in the centre of Darlington.

The 16 two-bedroom bungalows in Barton Street adjoin our award-winning development, on Engine House Lane.

Among the residents to move in are Rose and Andrew Inglis, aged 74 and 75, respectively. They downsized from the three-bedroom family home they lived in for 49 years.

Rose says: "I was struggling with the stairs in our old home and someone we knew lived in a Railway Housing Association bungalow, so they recommended we put our name down on the waiting list.

"We moved into our new home just before Christmas and it's the best thing we could have done; it's lovely."

Paul Summers, 67, has an old army friend to thank for alerting him and his wife Carol to their new home at Barton Street.

He explains: "I served in the Parachute Regiment with my friend who lives at The Sidings and he told me how nice the bungalows were, so we were delighted when we discovered our application had been successful.

"Carol was dubious about leaving our other home but now she's here and doesn't have to cope with two flights of stairs each day, she thinks it's fantastic."

Karilyn and Michael Foley, aged 67 and 76 respectively, also recently moved in and have settled in immediately.

Karilyn says: "We were renting a bungalow privately, but it never felt like home but this one does. and we love it."

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We managed to complete the development despite the disruption caused by Covid-19 during 2020

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Anne Rowlands, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: "It's lovely to hear so many good things about our new homes from the people who matter most; the residents who are now living in them.

"We managed to complete the development despite the disruption caused by Covid-19 during 2020 and as a result we have now made another contribution toward the much-needed provision of high quality, affordable housing for older people in Darlington."

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All the new homes will be rented to people aged 60 and over.

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Great Western Court, Hereford

We are pleased to unveil our new plans to extend our popular sheltered housing scheme for older people in the centre of Hereford.

A planning application has been submitted to Herefordshire Council to provide 14 additional homes at Great Western Court in Canonmoor Street.

We plan to invest over £2 million in the scheme, which will see the number of one-bedroom apartments increasing from 30 to 44.

Two of the apartments will be added in the existing building, with the other 12 being constructed in a new-build adjoining the 33-year-old complex.

Subject to planning approval, work will start on the new development in the autumn, with completion 12 months later.

All the new homes will be rented to people aged 60 and over.

As well as building new homes, we also plan to extend the communal lounge and parking.

And the award goes to...

We are delighted to have won another prestigious development award for our scheme in Darlington which included the sympathetic conversion of a listed railway engine shed built in 1844.

The Sidings won 'Best Development for Social/Affordable Rent' in the 2021 Northern Housing Awards, beating off competition from six other developments across the North which were short-listed in this category.

This is the second award given to The Sidings, with the Association also previously winning a Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) award.

And it could lead to a hat-trick because it has also been shortlisted in the category of 'Best Urban Development outside of London' in the Inside Housing Development of the Year awards, which will be determined later this year.

Judges at the Northern Housing Awards cited The Sidings for 'bringing new life to a historic building and its surrounding area'.



Providing a snapshot

We asked residents who are members of our Focus Groups and Resident Forum what they thought of this year's calendar that we sent to all residents in October 2020.

- 95% like the size and quality of the calendar
- 100% agree that the photos are interesting and attractive
- 100% agree that the information about the association's work and finances is easy to read and understand
- 83% would like next year's annual report to be another calendar
- Only one resident won't be using the calendar, and this is because their family has given them another calendar.

We will be running a similar competition this year (see enclosed leaflet). These were residents' suggestions for the photos for the next calendar:

- "Another round of similar photos would not go a miss - they were excellent."
- Nature would be my choice, for any age group an evocative picture of the natural world is uplifting and very pleasant too."
- Considering the past year we've all had, continue with nature and the great outdoors."
- "Scenes, local landmarks, wildlife in areas where the association has properties."
- "Railways."

See the leaflet for details of this year's photo competition and how you could win £100.



Snapping up the prize

There's no chance of Paula Craggs losing focus and that's why she was the deserving winner of our annual report photography competition.

Paula, who many of you will know as our Customer Services Assistant, was awarded the prize of £100 for her photograph of Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland which adorns the front of the calendar, as well as featuring in the month of May

All the pictures were judged by residents who are members of our Focus Groups and Resident Forum, and the best were used in the calendar.

Paula has donated the prize money to Cancer Research, a charity she says is close to her heart.



Residents' portal



Are you aware that we have a new online residents' portal?

The new and improved portal provides you with a secure online space to access a range of services, including:

- Reporting a non-urgent repair
- Uploading pictures of non-urgent repairs
- Checking the progress of a repair and your repairs history
- Checking your rent balance
- Downloading account statements
- Paying your rent and other charges
- Updating your contact details
- And much more...

To register, you firstly need to call us on **0800 028 7428** during our main office hours to receive your Activation Code and your Agreement Reference number. This is to protect your security and make sure no one else can access your account. If you are a new resident, you will have received these details as part of your Welcome Pack when you signed the legal agreement for your home.

Once you have this, you can access your account via <https://railwaytplive.civicahosting.co.uk/> and you should all now have received a visual, step-by-step guide to using the portal.

Keeping safe

At the time of producing this newsletter (June 2021), the date of 19 July 2021 is when the majority of Covid-19 restrictions will be lifted, including the end to social distancing, although this is still subject to change.

Please continue to follow Government guidance and to protect yourself and others from the virus, please remember to –

- Hands - wash your hands or use hand sanitiser every time you leave your home and as soon as you get back
- Face - wear a face covering in enclosed spaces and ask any visitors to your home to do the same
- Space - keep 2 metres (6 feet 6 inches) apart from anyone that you do not live with
- Fresh air - the more ventilated an area is, the more fresh air there is to breathe, and the less likely a person is to inhale infectious particles.

Safe use of face coverings

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and before and after removing it
- When wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands
- Change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it
- Continue to wash or sanitise your hands regularly
- If the face covering material is washable, wash it daily
- If it's not washable, dispose of it immediately after use in your usual waste
- Practise social distancing wherever possible.

Please think of others, even if you have been vaccinated you can still spread Covid19 to other people.



Staff and Board News

Since the last edition of RHA News, we have welcomed several new members of staff and two new board members so we are pleased to introduce...



Anthony Bell

Anthony is one of our new board members.

A qualified chartered surveyor, he currently works at Karbon Homes where he is Assistant Director of Assets & Regeneration for 30,000 homes stretching from the border of Scotland and into North Yorkshire.

Anthony says: "I am hoping I can make a major contribution by bringing my experience in asset management and compliance to help Railway Housing Association in the future."

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I am hoping I can make a major contribution by bringing my experience in asset management

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Philip Dunn

Philip is also a new board member.

Philip is a qualified accountant and an Executive Director at Alzheimer's Research UK, his father worked on the railways and one of his grandparents lived in a Railway Housing Association home.

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I am looking forward to using my experience in risk management and finance to support the team

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He says: "I am from the North East and have always been a big fan of the area, so it's great to be joining the board of an organisation with its head office in the region and which provides many homes for local people."



Steve Jones

Steve Jones, our new Maintenance Surveyor, has been in 38 prisons – but in his case it was an essential part of his job!

Steve has spent the last 20 years working in the social housing sector and prior to that, he worked as HM Surveyor of Prisons, a job which took him around the country.

He says: "I joke that I hold the record of being in 38 prisons and quickly clarify that by saying it was because it was my job to survey them!"

In his new role, Steve covers around 600 of our homes in the York, Doncaster, Leeds, and Hull areas. He is responsible for surveying properties before and after repairs and major planned works such as replacement of kitchens and bathrooms; overseeing contractors; and for completing stock condition surveys.

Steve is not expecting a repeat of something he experienced when he went to survey a home for a previous employer.

He recalls: "I went into the kitchen and there was a pony in there. The family had made a stable for the pony in the kitchen; that's certainly not something you expect to see every day!"

Staff and Board News



Andrew Bargewell

If you are one of our residents in Yorkshire, the chances are that Andrew Bargewell has become a familiar voice at the end of the phone, and he's hoping that 2021 will allow for more face-to-face contact!

Andrew joined in spring 2020, just as the first lockdown started, so was unable to get out and about in his new patch as he had intended,

Based in York and also covering Leeds, Doncaster and surrounding areas such as Scarborough, Selby and Knaresborough, Andrew has day-to-day responsibility for the management of 374 homes.

He is the first point of contact for residents living in these areas and his wide-ranging role includes carrying out home visits, undertaking regular estate inspections, advising on rent issues, and signing up new residents.

Andrew has great experience in housing management, having worked as a housing officer for 16 years.



Ellie Tighe

Whether its broken lightbulbs or boilers, it's very likely that as a resident of Railway Housing Association, it will be Ellie Tighe who will be trying to help you.

That is because as our Maintenance Assistant, Ellie is generally the first port of call for residents contacting us to report an issue in their home.

“being able to talk each day to our residents and help them to resolve the issue is something I really enjoy.”

Ellie works afternoons, with fellow Maintenance Assistant Sharon Worrall taking the morning shift.

She says: “I like doing general admin and consider myself a people person, so being able to talk each day to our residents and help them to resolve the issue is something I really enjoy.”



Hayley Giles

Hayley Giles will always put her 'oar' in when it comes to supporting Railway Housing Association's residents in Hull and East Riding.

And with 30 years housing experience, she's always guaranteed to be able to help navigate people through to calmer waters.

Hayley joined Railway Housing Association as a Housing Officer in September 2020.

Now learning to row in her spare time, Hayley has responsibility for looking after the interests of people living in around 220 of our homes in Hull and East Riding.

This includes carrying out home visits, signing up new residents and dealing with tenancy management issues.

Hayley says: “I was keen to work for a smaller organisation which has a good local touch, and Railway Housing Association really fit the bill where this is concerned.

“It makes it easier to get to know the residents and staff; everyone is very friendly, and my first impressions are very good indeed.”

On the right track

Our first-ever apprentice is continuing on the right tracks – 10 years after first joining us.

Charlotte Wallace began working at Railway Housing Association at the tender age of 17. The first apprentice in our 100 years-plus history, Charlotte, now aged 28, has made great strides, the latest achievement being the successful completion of a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Building Studies.

This follows her promotion from Maintenance Assistant to the job she now holds as Contracts Coordinator, where her responsibilities mainly revolve around health and safety, such as fire and gas inspections and water hygiene and liaising with contractors who carry out this work. She also continues to have regular contact with the Association's residents.

Charlotte adds: "The last 11 years have gone so quickly and it's hard to believe I started as an apprentice and have worked my way up, and now even have a qualification to my name."



Rent update

The government has said that rents can increase by up to the rate of inflation (as measured by the Consumer Price Index in September of the previous year) plus 1%. The Consumer Price Index is a national measure that is calculated by taking prices for certain goods and services and averaging these.

In September 2020, the Consumer Price Index was 0.5% so we will be increasing rents by 0.5% plus 1%, a total of 1.5%, from 2 August 2021. We set rents at a level that means we can repair and improve homes, provide services to residents, build much needed new homes and stay financially viable.

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Many residents will not be affected by the increase because the benefits they receive will increase to cover the cost of their rent

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Many residents will not be affected by the increase because the benefits they receive will increase to cover the cost of their rent. For others, based on our average assured rent of £76.87 in 2020, the proposed rent increase from August 2021 will be £1.15 per week.

This increase does not apply to the charges that are made for services such as cleaning of communal areas and grass cutting. The actual costs of these services will be charged on top of the rent.

We will write to give you one month's notice before the increase is made to your rent.

If your tenancy started before 1989, your rent is set by the Government's Valuation Office Agency Rent Officers every two years. We will ask the Rent Officer to increase your rent by 1.5% (based on the Consumer Price Index of 0.5% plus 1%) but if the Rent Officer sets a lower rent then we will charge you the rent set by the Rent Officer.

We consulted with residents who are Focus Group members, about our budget for 2021/22, including the rent increase, to make sure that their views were taken into account before the rent increase is made.

We are a not-for-profit charitable housing association and increasing rents is always a difficult decision but our main source of income is from rents and the rent increase is essential so that we can continue to meet our responsibilities to provide and maintain good quality homes and services for residents.

If you are struggling to pay your rent, please contact us on 0800 0287428 as soon as possible. We can help to make sure you are getting all of the money you are entitled to and put you in touch with other services that can help you to keep on top of your rent and other household bills –

Citizens Advice

Visit: citizensadvice.org.uk

Tel: 0800 1448848

Debtline: 0800 240 4420

Turn 2 Us

Visit: turn2us.org.uk

Tel: 0808 802 2000

Step Change

Visit: stepchange.org

Tel: 0800 138 1111

Money Advice Service

Visit: moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Tel: 0800 138 7777

Setting the standard

Does Railway Housing Association (RHA) meet the standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing?

DOES RHA MEET THE STANDARD?	YES/ NO	EXAMPLES/EVIDENCE OF HOW WE MEET THE STANDARD
Governance & financial viability – is RHA well managed and has enough money to meet its responsibilities?	Yes	The association is currently assessed by the Regulator of Social Housing as meeting the highest possible rating for governance and financial viability.
Value for Money – does RHA provide good quality homes and services at a reasonable cost?	Yes	Value for money is considered in all of our decisions; we agree funding priorities with residents; and use our funds to achieve a balance between providing services, maintaining existing homes and providing new homes.
Rent – do the rents charged by RHA meet government requirements?	Yes	All rents are charged in accordance with regulatory requirements. This is confirmed by an independent audit of rents.
Tenant Involvement & Empowerment – does RHA provide appropriate information to residents; deal with complaints well; offer a good range of opportunities for residents to influence how RHA works; and treat all residents fairly and with respect?	Yes	<p>Residents receive lots of information at the start of their tenancy including a 'Residents Handbook', 'Repairs Handbook' and information leaflets. Information is also available on our website and in newsletters. Details of our performance is published in newsletters and annual reports; and reported to residents' focus groups.</p> <p>100% of complaints were resolved at the first stage in 2019/20.</p> <p>Residents can be involved in the management of RHA by joining the Residents' Forum, Focus Groups, Leaseholders' Forum, Scrutiny Panel and Board.</p> <p>Our Equality and Diversity policy and strategy set out how we work to eliminate discrimination and harassment, and to promote tolerance, fairness and equality.</p> <p>Resident profile information is used to tailor services by taking into account the specific needs of individual residents, for example, using large print, translation/interpretation services, specialist smoke alarms for hard of hearing, and arranging for next of kin or a carer to be present during any home visits. At 31 March 2020, profile information had been provided by 98% of our residents.</p>
Home – does RHA provide a cost effective repairs service that maintains homes to at least the government's Decent Homes Standard and carries out all health and safety requirements?	Yes	<p>100% of RHA's homes meet the Decent Homes Standard</p> <p>94% of residents are satisfied with the repairs service, which compares very well with other landlords.</p> <p>85% of repairs were completed at the first visit in 2019/20.</p> <p>84.4% of asbestos, fire, gas, electrical, water and lifts safety checks were completed on time in 2019/20.</p>
Tenancy – does RHA let homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way; help residents who want to exchange their tenancy with another resident; and offer appropriate tenancies?	Yes	<p>Housing need is measured by a points based system so that homes are let to those applicants who need them the most.</p> <p>At least 50% of re-lets are offered to the local councils for applicants on their waiting list.</p> <p>The average number of days taken to re-let homes was 20.3 days in 2019/20, a significant improvement from 35.8 days in 2018/19.</p> <p>We subscribe to Home Swapper so that the mutual exchange service is free to all of our residents.</p> <p>Our residents are given lifetime tenancies.</p>
Neighbourhood & Community – does RHA keep communal areas clean and safe; and work in partnership with residents and other landlords and public bodies to deal with any problems in the	Yes	93% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood and in 2019/20 86% were satisfied with the way that their report of anti-social behaviour was handled and the outcome.

Making a difference

In 2019/20, more than 250 residents told us their opinions and made a difference:-

YOU SAID	WE DID
Hold the residents' away day once every 2 years to save money	The away day is on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic but should be back in 2022 and will then be held every two years
There aren't enough washing machines at our scheme for the number of residents	An extra washing machine has been installed
When a home is re-let, the association should install the new resident's gas cooker and recharge them for the cost, to make sure it is done safely	New residents are now given the choice of paying the association to connect their gas cooker or finding a qualified gas fitter to connect it.
We are worried about security	A community police officer attended a residents' meeting and offered advice on security
Residents should be involved in the design of replacement kitchens and bathrooms	We will involve each resident in the design when a new kitchen or bathroom is fitted in their home
The communal rubbish bins are difficult to use	The local council changed the bins to ones that are easier to use
We want to pick up litter outside our scheme	Litter pickers have been provided so that residents can pick up litter safely
Residents should be involved in the design of new homes to make sure that there is enough storage space, easy clean flooring in kitchens and bathrooms, changes are made to the kitchen design, and more water butts are provided	Residents from newly built homes will be invited to meet and discuss their likes and dislikes of the design and make suggestions for improving the design of new homes
If we are not at home when a contractor comes to do an external repair, we don't know that it's been done	Residents are now informed of the date and an idea of the time of day that a contractor plans to complete an external repair; and if there is no one at home then the contractor will leave a note to let them know that the work has been completed
Contractors working in our homes stop work to make and take calls on their mobile phones	Contractors have been asked not to take or make mobile telephone calls whilst working at a resident's home, unless it is about the job in hand or an emergency

If you want to make a difference and help improve the association's services, please call us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or email info@railwayha.co.uk. You could join the Residents' Scrutiny Panel, a Focus Group or tell us your views from the comfort of your own home by joining the Residents' Forum.

Phone a friend

Age UK and Silver Line offer a free telephone friendship service matching people aged 60 and over with a friendly volunteer for a weekly chat. It has helped to create thousands of new friendships. You don't need to be feeling lonely or to live on your own, sometimes it's just nice to talk.

How does it work?

The telephone friendship service is an easy and safe way to meet a new friend, from the comfort of your own home. You tell Silver Line a little bit about yourself and your interests, they match you to a friendly volunteer for a weekly phone chat at a time that's convenient for you

Who is it for?

Anyone over 60 with their own landline or mobile phone, with time to chat at the same time every week.

Silver Line can also provide information and advice, put you in touch with local groups and services, and protect and support older people who are suffering abuse and neglect.

Call 0800 4708090, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Silver Circles are group phone calls when people with shared interests can chat with a small group of 6 to 8 other people. Calls are free, the costs are covered by Silver Line.

Silver Connects provides support, advice and help with finding local services – from housing and health to lunch clubs and financial advice.

"Lisa phones me every Sunday and we chat for as long as we like. I look forward to the call every week. I organise my dinner around it so we can have a good chat. I'd very much recommend the service to other people. It's another lifeline really. It's something to look forward to and another person to talk to." – Ted, 85

Pension Credit

Around 2.5 million households claim Pension Credit, but it is estimated that up to 1 million are still missing out on it. If you are of state pension age you may be able to entitled to claim it.

Pension Credit is made up of two parts – Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit.

Guarantee Credit tops up your weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level, which is £177.10 for single people and £270.30 for a couple.

“

it is estimated that up to 1 million are still missing out

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Savings Credit is paid as a 'reward' if you have saved for your retirement, for example through a pension scheme. You can only claim Savings Credit if you reached state pension age before 6 April 2016. It's worth up to £14.04 a week for a single person and £15.71 for a couple.

You need to be state pension age to claim Pension Credit. By claiming Pension Credit you may also qualify for other payments and benefits such as free NHS prescriptions, council tax support, free eye tests, and free TV licence for those aged over 75 years.

Make a claim online <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim> or by post or by calling the Pension Credit Claim Line on **0800 99 1234**. You'll need your National Insurance number, details of all of your income, pensions, savings, and your bank account details. Pension Credit is usually paid straight into your bank, building society or Post Office account every four weeks.

Health & Safety



We aim to -

- Meet all legal requirements to protect the health and safety of our residents, employees and anyone else affected by our work
- Consult with our residents and employees on matters affecting their health and safety
- Maintain properties to a standard that is fit for purpose and safe for residents to live in or for members of staff to work in
- Comply with Gas Safety Regulations and check gas installations annually
- Comply with the Control of Asbestos Regulations
- Carry out annual fire risk assessments of our offices and the communal areas of sheltered housing schemes; and biennial fire risk assessments of other schemes with communal staircases
- Regularly check fire detectors, fire alarms, emergency lighting systems, fire extinguishers and any other fire equipment provided by the Association
- Comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations
- Operate a no smoking policy in all offices and in the communal areas of dwellings
- Carry out electrical testing every five years
- Ensure regular checks and servicing of passenger lifts
- Operate an effective system of water hygiene management to ensure the safe supply of hot and cold water in dwellings with communal water systems and in offices
- Comply with Construction (Design and Management) Regulations
- Carry out stock condition surveys on a 5 year rolling programme
- Provide information, instruction and supervision for employees
- Ensure all employees are competent to do their tasks, and to give them adequate training
- Provide adequate safety equipment
- Carry out annual risk assessments for staff who are required to work unaccompanied
- Prevent accidents and cases of work related ill health
- Maintain safe and healthy working conditions that promote wellbeing.



Did you know?

This newsletter is sent in recyclable plastic packaging made from biodegradable potato starch. You can put it into your compost or household recycling bin. Better still, if you want to receive the newsletter by email and save paper, email us at info@railwayha.co.uk





A 'Great' community

It may have been a year to forget, but residents at our Great Western Court sheltered housing scheme in Hereford managed to find various ways of helping mind, body and soul during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

The Three Degrees (Mrs Lee, Mrs Lillico and Mrs Sykes) exercised on the lawn each day, and green-fingered Mr Yardley created a new natural garden area under the old shrubs at entrance to the scheme by splitting and transplanting flowers from some of the established beds and upgrading a shrubbery at the rear of the scheme.

Mr Edwards put out chairs all around the gardens every day to allow for social distancing safely which was a huge help given the gardens were used so much in the lovely weather over spring and summer, and he also took them back in at the end of the day!

Mrs Baxter kept creative with sewing and craft work and Mr Emery helped so many people by getting their shopping

Mr Farr turned 100 during lock-down so we sent him a hamper and his friends from The Salvation Army came and sang on the lawn. He is also a dab hand at the cornet so on VE Day he played We'll Meet Again for everyone, as you will see from the picture above.

“

There's always been a great sense of community spirit in our little part of Hereford

”

The Salvation Army also kindly provided treats and groceries courtesy of Morrisons Supermarket for residents and Lord Scudamore Infants School sent handmade cards and messages to each of the residents which were gratefully received. Thank you letters were sent back to the children from residents, together with a big selection of sweets for the children to enjoy

And Bake and Create, a local firm, provided picnic bags to allow everyone the opportunity to have a socially distanced picnic when shielding ended in August.

There's always been a great sense of community spirit in our little part of Hereford and it was never more evident in 2020.



Getting social

Do you know we now have four social media channels?

We use the different channels as a further means of sharing information with our residents and the wider public, particularly at the moment focusing on news stories and blogs from our Chief Executive Anne, as well as highlighting the different services we offer.

As more of our residents continue to get online, we expect social media to become an even more important communication tool in the years to come.

If you use any of the same social media channels personally, please like/follow/subscribe our pages to ensure you can regularly see our posts and we would welcome comments on our posts.

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/railwayhousingassociation>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/RailwayHousing>

LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/railway-housing-association>

YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC93P2hT3dWhx5_4SpJ6Hebw

Together with Tenants charter



The Together with Tenants charter aims to strengthen the relationship between residents and housing association landlords.

Housing associations that adopt the charter commit to:



Relationships

Housing associations will treat all residents with respect in all of their interactions. Relationships between residents and housing associations will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.



Communication

Residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information from their housing association on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.



Voice and influence

Views from residents will be sought and valued and this information will be used to inform decisions. Every individual resident will feel listened to by their housing association on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.



Accountability

Collectively, residents will work in partnership with their housing association to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services.



Quality

Residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.



When things go wrong

Residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

To find out more about Together with Tenants, visit: housing.org.uk/tenants

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

Food banks

It isn't right that anyone should be left hungry but there has been a need for food banks in the UK for the last 20 years. Food banks provide emergency food and support to people who can't afford to feed themselves. They are usually run by volunteers, with food being donated by the public at places such as schools, churches and supermarket collection points.

Health visitors, social workers, school staff and other similar professionals give food bank vouchers to people who need help and can exchange the vouchers for a few days nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food from their local food bank. Some food banks also offer additional support such as debt and welfare benefits advice, to help people to get out of their difficult financial circumstances.

“emergency food parcels needed has increased by up to 88% during the coronavirus pandemic.”

In February 2021, there were over 2,200 food banks in the UK and the number of emergency food parcels needed has increased by up to 88% during the coronavirus pandemic.

Food banks rely on the support of the public to provide the food that is so badly needed. One of Railway Housing Association's contractors, Derek Shaw, who will be known to many residents in the North East, made a generous donation at Christmas to one of the many foodbanks in Newcastle upon Tyne.

If you have money problems and can't afford to feed yourself or your family, call the Trussell Trust's confidential and free helpline on 0808 208 2138 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm). They will talk to you about the problems you're facing and provide support to help you manage your money, navigate the benefits system, and identify any other grants you might be entitled to. If you need one, they'll issue you with a food bank voucher so you can get an emergency food parcel.

Or find your local food bank on: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/> or contact your local council

Your local food bank will be able to tell you which referral agencies they work with in your area and how you can get a voucher.

If you would like to volunteer or donate, contact the Trussell Trust:

Web: www.trusselltrust.org/about/contact-us

Tel: 01722 580180

Email: enquiries@trusselltrust.org

You can also contact your local food bank. Many supermarkets, churches and schools have collection points for donations of food for food banks.



Comments, compliments, complaints

We always try to give a good service but sometimes things go wrong. When this happens we need to know about it so we can put it right and improve our service.

You can tell us your comments, compliments or complaint by -

- Telephoning: **0800 0287428**
- Emailing: **info@railwayha.co.uk**
- Online via our website: **www.railwayha.co.uk**
- Writing to us at the address shown on the last page of this newsletter

We will try to sort out your complaint as soon as you make us aware of the problem. However, if we are unable to sort it out to your satisfaction then there are two stages to our complaints procedure.

We aim to acknowledge complaints within 2 working days and to give a full response within 10 working days at stage 1 and within 20 working days at stage 2.

We received 37 complaints in 2019/20, compared to 40 the year before.

STAGE 1

A Manager of the Association will investigate your complaint. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome then you can ask for your complaint to be taken to stage 2.

STAGE 2

At stage 2 a Director will review and investigate your complaint.



We will try to sort out your complaint as soon as you make us aware of the problem.



If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome then you can contact your local Councillor, a Member of Parliament (MP) or a Tenant Panel who will try to resolve the complaint for you. If your local Councillor, a MP or Tenant Panel cannot resolve your complaint to your satisfaction then you can contact

The Housing Ombudsman Service at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool, L33 7WQ

Telephone: **0300 111 3000**

Email: **info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk**

Use the online form on: **www.housingombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint**

The Ombudsman provides a free and independent service for customers of housing associations and will investigate your complaint. The Ombudsman will not usually consider a complaint until you have fully completed all stages of our complaints procedure and your local Councillor or a MP has tried to resolve your complaint. However, the Ombudsman can offer you advice and support at any stage of your complaint.

Other people that may be able to help you include:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Housing Advice Centres
- Law centres
- Independent Mediation Service

A copy of our full complaints policy and procedure is available on our website and on request.

How we compare to other landlords	Railway Housing Association	Other similar landlords
Complainants satisfied with how we dealt with their complaint	62%	59.6%
Complainants satisfied with the outcome of their complaint	43%	53%
Percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days	81%	81.9%

Word Search

Human Bones

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

Last Edition Winners

The winner of the word search puzzle in the last edition of RHA News was Linda McArthur of Redcar, who receives £25.

The winners of £25 in the quarterly lettable standard survey draw were Irine Hudson, of Hartlepool; Attila G Schmidt, of Doncaster; William Hopcutt, of York; Moira Adams, of York; and Patricia Connell, of Stockton.

MANDIBLE

RADIUS

METATARSAL

FEMUR

SCAPHOID

TALUS

STAPES

HAMATE

TRAPEZIUM

TIBIA

PATELLA

TEMPORAL

ULNA

CLAVICLE

COCCYX

STERNUM

MALLEUS

HUMERUS

FIBULA

Please cut out and return your completed word search to the address on the back page and remembering to include your name, address and contact number.

WIN
£25

Our performance

Our performance as at 31st March 2021

Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.91% (target is 2%)



Lettings

Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 45.5% (target 70%)

No homes were re-let during the first lockdown and lettings are now slower because of the extra precautions taken to keep everyone safe.



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 – 88% (target is 87%)



Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 95% (target is 97%)



Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 89% (target is 86%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 81% (target is 85%)
Although this is still below target, it has improved by 20% over the last 12 months.



Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 3.53% (target is 5%).



This is the first time that the target for savings has not been achieved. We expect to achieve the target in 2021/22.



Green
Performance on target



Amber
Performance below but close to target



Red
Action is needed to meet target

