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You said, we did

You said:

We don't know what work is planned to improve the energy efficiency of our homes. The best way to tell us about this is an annual newsletter.

We did:

Since 2013 we've published the Maintenance Mail, which includes details about how much has been spent on improvement works, what work is planned for the next 5 years, feedback from residents about the work, and information about our maintenance services such as repairs, gas safety and garden maintenance.



Residents who are members of the Resident Forum and/or Focus Groups recently told us what they think of the Maintenance Mail:-

- 92% are interested to know about improvement work that has been completed
- 75% were interested to hear what residents had to say about the work that had been carried out in their homes
- 88% are interested in what improvement work is planned for the next 5 years
- 92% want to know about the standard of the repairs service we provide and how satisfied residents are with the service
- 67% want to know about residents' satisfaction with the gas safety service
- 71% are interested in knowing how satisfied residents are with the garden maintenance service
- 83% are interested to know what changes we've made to improve the value for money of our maintenance services
- 96% think that Maintenance Mail is worthwhile

Residents' Forum

Would you like to tell us what you think about the Association and the services we provide?

The Residents' Forum lets you do this from the comfort of your own home by completing postal, email and telephone surveys. It only takes a few minutes of your time.

Members of the Residents' Forum have recently given us their views on the Annual Report and the Maintenance Mail.

The results were publicised in RHA News and will influence how these are designed and published in future.

If you are interested in joining the Residents' Forum please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or at info@railwayha.co.uk or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR.

The Weatherman



“That was a scary time because we were under almost constant attack from the Argentine air force”

It may be hard to believe but the fate of billions pounds of oil, and the environment, potentially lies in the hands of one of our residents – professional weatherman Taff Jones.

Mr Jones, who lives in one of our homes in Swanland, near Hull, is a self-employed meteorologist who provides weather forecasts for shipping leaving the Middle East carrying oil.

The information he provides determines when the ships will set sail for destinations such as Japan, with any predicted bad weather likely to keep them in port, or seeking alternative routes.

Mr Jones explains: “These ships are carrying millions of tonnes of oil, worth billions of pounds, so it's vital the captains know, in advance, what the weather will be like when they are out at sea.”

Mr Jones trained to be a meteorologist when he was in the Royal Navy. He was interested in the weather and on learning the Navy had their own Meteorology Unit, he began as a weather forecaster.

He says: “We sailed all around the world so you can imagine that along the way we encountered some very bad weather, including hurricanes and typhoons.

“A helicopter or plane may take off a ship in normal conditions, but they needed to know what it was going to be like when they got in the air, so our job was very important.”

Mr Jones served on board the HMF Fearless when it saw action in the Falklands War in 1982.

He recalls: “That was a scary time because we were under almost constant attack from the Argentine air force,

but apart from a few near misses, we were lucky compared to some of the other ships.

“I remember briefing an SAS Major about the weather just before they went ashore on a secret mission, so you felt like you were playing a vital part in the war.”

After leaving the Navy, Mr Jones served on a weather ship in the North Atlantic that would send information to the Met Office.

Aged 67, he continues to work each day, getting up at 5am in the morning to chart the weather across the world – a job he says he continues to love. As well as providing forecasts for shipping, he has also advised the large UK supermarkets, who use the information when deciding how much fresh produce to buy.

When asked why the British summers have been so poor in recent years, he shrugs and says: “It's easy to blame meteorologists for incorrect forecasting and that's one of the reasons why the Government has told the Met Office to stop predicting BBQ summers and freezing winters.

“The truth is that long-term weather forecasting is almost impossible because global warming, along with other factors, has made everything very hard to predict.

“But one of the main reasons we have not had great summers, certainly in the north, is that for the last few years the jet stream, which plays a large role when it comes to the weather in this country, has remained to the south of the UK, when it needs to be in the north to keep the cold weather away.”

Changes to Housing Benefit

From 1st April 2018 housing benefit for tenants of housing associations like Railway Housing Association will be limited to the Local Housing Allowance rate, which is the amount of housing benefit payable for tenants of private landlords.

What does it mean for me?

If your tenancy starts anytime from 1st April 2016 (1st April 2017 for sheltered housing) onwards, the amount of housing benefit that you can receive towards your rent from 1st April 2018 may be limited.

The amount of housing 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 you are under 35 years old and do not have any dependent children living with you, from 1st April 2018 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>

These changes will apply to all new tenancies, whether you are a new tenant to Railway Housing Association or if you are already a tenant with us and move to a different home.

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 1st April 2018, 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 1st April 2018 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 (1st April 2017 for sheltered housing) and receive housing benefit towards your rent, you will need to find out if your rent is higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate and think about how you will pay any shortfall.

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 or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR.

Rent update

From 2016/17, the government requires us to reduce most rents by 1% per year for the next four years.

However, if you live in one of our sheltered housing schemes then the government states that we should increase your rent by 0.9% (September 2015 consumer price index plus 1%) in 2016/17. The rent cut has been delayed by one year for sheltered housing whilst the government carries out a review of how supported and sheltered housing is funded. This is in response to concerns that reducing rents could make it difficult to provide this type of accommodation in the future.

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 8 August 2016.

We will be consulting with residents who are members of our focus groups about our budget for 2016/17, 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.

Read all about it



“Among the things that were buried was a recording of one of my broadcasts”

Rod Crocker remembers vividly the day when his current home – our Stephenson Court in Hull – opened in 1982.

That is not because he was a resident at the time, but because he covered the event in his role as a reporter for BBC Radio Humberside.

Mr Crocker remembers interviewing Frank Paterson, the man who performed the official opening and who the adjoining Paterson House is named after.

He said: “I remember him saying that this was a new concept of housing and predicting, even back in 1982, that there would be a time when people living in these homes would not have a railway background.”

Mr Crocker became a journalist, aged 16, when he started working for a local newspaper in the south of England.

He says it is something he was born into, given his mum and dad both worked for the BBC.

He soon followed them into broadcasting and got a job for BBC Radio Humberside. He covered many interesting stories during his time at the station, including:

- The Cod Wars, which were a series of confrontations between the UK and countries such as Iceland and Denmark, which had major repercussions in Hull.
- The clearance of slums in Hull and the creation of tower blocks which subsequently created their own social problems.
- The opening of the Humber Bridge.
- The steel workers' strike.
- The miners' strike.

- The murder of three boys in Selby Street, Hull, by Bruce Lee.
- An accident at the filming of It's a Knockout in Scunthorpe which resulted in 60 people being injured when scaffolding collapsed.

Now aged 61, Mr Crocker still works as a freelance journalist for newspapers and radio and, amazingly, in the year 3982 his voice will still be heard.

He explains: “In 1982, I covered a story at Castle Howard where George Howard, who was the Chairman of the BBC at the time, decided to bury a time capsule in the grounds.

“Among the things that were buried was a recording of one of my broadcasts, so when it is opened in 3982 – 2000 years after first being buried – people will be able to hear me – that’s quite something!”



“One of the things I like about it the best is that it’s such a sociable game”

Bowled over

Diana Jones' husband Tony describes himself as a bowls widower – and it is little wonder given the amount of time his wife dedicates to the sport.

Since taking up lawn bowling in 1991, Diana, who lives on one of our homes in Cottingham, near Hull, has amassed numerous titles, including Yorkshire Women's Champion and, most recently, Yorkshire Pairs Champion.

From April to September she is very rarely away from the bowling green, either practising at Kingston Bowling Club or playing in competitions, and just when the nights start to draw in she plays indoor bowls too.

Diana, 76, says: "I took to bowling very quickly and the club saw the potential in me and gave me coaching.

"On the surface it looks like an easy sport to play. In that you roll your ball to the jack, but in reality it's a very technical and strategic game.

"One of the things I like about it the best is that it's such a sociable game and one you can play at a competitive level at a later age of your life."

A few years ago, Diana was diagnosed with lung cancer but, amazingly, was back bowling again just five weeks after completing her treatment.

The last word goes to Alan, who says: "She really is a very good bowler; much better than I ever was and I am so proud of her.

"I say rather than being a WAG, I am a HAB (husband and boyfriend) and when we go bowling together people say 'who's that with Di Jones!'"

Under scrutiny

Over the last year, our Scrutiny Panel of eight residents has scrutinised how we handle complaints from customers.

This involved looking at:

- Regulatory requirements
- Good practice in complaints handling
- The Association's policy, procedure and customer leaflet for handling complaints
- How other landlords handle complaints
- Evidence of how the Association handles complaints
- The survey used by the Association to gauge customers' satisfaction with complaints handling

The Panel found that our approach to handling complaints:

- Is clear, simple and accessible; and ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly
- Offers a range of ways for customers to make a complaint
- Sets out clear service standards for responding to complaints and details of what customers should do if they are unhappy with the outcome

The Panel was also satisfied that we meet regulatory requirements and good practice to:

- Inform tenants how complaints are used to improve services
- Publish information about complaints each year, including the number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints

When the Panel compared other landlords who are rated as performing well in handling complaints they did not find any improvements that could be made to the way that we handle complaints.

The Scrutiny Panel is now examining how we involve residents and their findings will be reported in a future issue of the newsletter.

However, the Panel made several recommendations to:

- Amend the wording of our complaints policy and procedure to clarify certain points
- Amend the survey form that is used to find out customer satisfaction with the handling of their complaint
- Use telephone surveys for checking customer satisfaction with the handling of complaints
- Email the customer satisfaction survey to those customers who prefer this method of communication

These recommendations have been agreed and implemented by the Association.

The Scrutiny Panel is now examining how we involve residents and their findings will be reported in a future issue of the newsletter.

If you are interested in joining the Scrutiny Panel please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or at info@railwayha.co.uk or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR.

Spanning the generations

Earlier this year Patricia Hendy, a resident of Great Western Court in Hereford, suggested to the Residents' Committee that it would be a good idea to raise money for diabetes sufferers, a charity close to her heart as her late partner had this awful disease.

Following Pat's suggestion, it was agreed that this would be the chosen spring charity at the Scheme.

Pat, along with her daughter Sandra, grand-daughter Kelly and great grand-daughter Lois, and her close neighbour Carolyn Baxter started to plan and pull it all together.

On 12th March, there was a fundraiser held at Great Western Court and with the help of other residents and friends who donated prizes and spent their money a very enjoyable morning took place helping to raise over £450

The amount was then increased with donations received and a sales table in the scheme going up to a brilliant £550. This total will be added to in May when a quiz and hotdog supper is planned.

The Residents' Committee was very pleased to write a letter to Lois's school about her involvement in this, and other charitable events, and her headmaster mentioned it to her fellow pupils at a morning assembly.





“We are delighted to have been able to secure someone of Berni’s calibre”

New Chair elected

We are pleased to announce the appointment of the first female Chair in our 97-year history.

Berni Whitaker is the new Chair-Elect at Railway Housing Association and will officially take up her role in July this year. Until then, she is serving as a regular member of the Association’s Board.

The 54-year-old married mother of three, who currently works for Sunderland City Council as Enterprise Manager, will take over from Geoff Proudlock, who is standing down as Chair after the completion of the maximum term of office for Board members.

Berni has spent most of her professional career working in economic development and regeneration. She also has significant housing board member experience.

She said: “I am delighted to have been appointed as Chair-Elect and am very proud to know I will be the first female Chair in Railway Housing Association’s history.

“I have already been given a tour of some of the Association’s properties and I was very impressed with the good condition of their stock.

“I am looking forward to this new challenge and to leading the Association into its 100th year in 2019.”

Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands said: “We are delighted to have been able to secure someone of Berni’s calibre and I am looking forward to working with her in the coming years.

Berni Whitaker (centre) with current Railway Housing Association Chair, Geoff Proudlock and Chief Executive Anne Rowlands.

“These are very challenging times for the social housing sector and our residents, with welfare benefit reforms, rent decreases, reduction in the grants available to build new homes for rent and the planned Right to Buy scheme all having an impact.

“But we are confident that by having a Chair like Berni, supported by an 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.

“I would like to take this opportunity of also thanking Geoff for his contribution as a board member and chair over the last ten years; he has played a significant part in the continued success of the Association.”

Contacting you

Twice a year we write to all residents offering to visit and discuss any concerns. However, very few residents accept this offer so we have looked at whether or not it is worthwhile.

In 2014/15 it cost £1,933 to send two letters to all residents offering to visit but only 39 (1.37%) residents replied and wanted us to visit them.

We discussed this with residents who are members of the Focus Groups. They agreed that it is not good value for money and that we should reduce the frequency of visits to all except more vulnerable residents.

From 1st April 2016 we will contact those residents who may be vulnerable due to age, ill health or another reason, offering to continue to visit twice yearly. All other residents will be visited at least once every two years.

In between these routine visits we will continue to visit and contact you whenever needed to discuss individual matters.

If you have not been contacted, or if your circumstances change and you would like us to visit you twice yearly; or if you would like to comment on this change to our services, please contact us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or at info@railwayha.co.uk or Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR.

From 1st April 2016 we will contact those residents who may be vulnerable due to age, ill health or another reason, offering to continue to visit twice yearly

Out of hours

From 3rd May 2016, our out of office hours’ emergency repairs telephone number has changed to:

0300 303 4917

Please use this number if you call to report an emergency repair before 8.30am or after 4.30pm, or at a weekend.

During the day, Monday to Friday you should still call free-phone:

0800 0287428



A handy man

A handyman at one of our sheltered housing schemes recently hung up his tools - at the grand age of 89.

Jack Willsden has spent the last 21 years doing odd jobs at Martin Cheesman Court in York.

A resident at the scheme himself, he did everything from changing light bulbs to keeping the gardens tidy.

To mark his retirement, friends, family and staff held a party in his honour and presented him with £500 of High Street vouchers.

We would like to thank Jack for all his hard work over the years.

Quarterly survey

The winners of our quarterly lettable standard survey, and receiving £25, are Mr & Mrs Goodison of Southwood Avenue, Cottingham, near Hull.

They said: “We’re so pleased with the bungalow, so to win this prize is just lovely.”

The Centenarians

Since the last edition of RHA News, two of our residents have celebrated momentous birthdays.

Joseph Tarn, from Bishop Auckland, turned 101 and Edna Smith, from Stockton, reached an amazing 104.

Mr Tarn, who was taken out for lunch by his family, used his birthday to reminisce about his life, which has included flying on Concorde, taking the Orient Express and managing 500 members of staff.

Mrs Smith took her birthday in her stride by having a game of bingo with her friends

Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands said: "We were delighted to be able to share Mr Tarn and Mrs Smith's birthday with them and present them both with some flowers."



Above: Mr Tarn with Railway Housing Association's Julie Clark (right) and his daughter Jennifer.

Below: Mrs Smith with Railway Housing Association Chief Executive Anne Rowlands.



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.

1st October 2015 to 31st December 2015

Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.82% (target is 1.90)



Lettings

Average time taken to repair and re-let an empty property – 35.28 days (target is 25 days)

Although this is still below target, the average re-let time has reduced by 6.25 days since the last report.



Response to Letters

Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 95% (target is 98%)



Estate Inspections

Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months – 83% (target is 85%)



Green
Performance on target



Amber
Performance below but close to target



Red
Action is needed to meet target

Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 88% (target is 94%)



The small number of complaints we receive means that if one isn't resolved at the first stage it has a big impact. Overall, 14 of 16 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 86%)



Percentage of repairs completed on time – 98% (target is 99%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 77% (target is 85%)



Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 2.52% (target is 5%)





Recipe: Spring fish pie (serves 2)

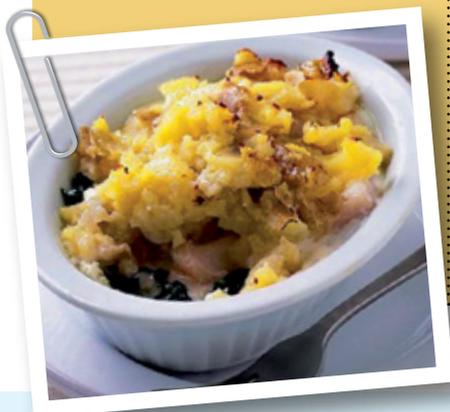
Prep time: **5 minutes**
 Cooking time: **35 minutes**
 Difficulty level: **Easy**

Ingredients

- 250g bag washed leaf spinach
- 450g small new potato
- 2 egg
- 300g skinless, boneless white fish fillet, cut into large chunks
- 100g half-fat crème fraîche
- juice 1/2 lemon
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Per serving:

Kcal: 529
 Fat: 22g
 Protein: 44g
 Fibre: 4.9g
 Carbs: 41g
 Sugar: 6.5g
 Saturates: 7.7g
 Salt: 1g



1. Heat oven to 220C/fan 200C /gas 7. Tip the spinach into a colander sitting in the sink and tip the potatoes into a saucepan. Bring a kettle full of water to the boil and pour enough over the potatoes to cover and slowly pour the rest over the spinach to wilt it. Bring the potatoes to the boil and cook for 8-10 mins until tender, then drain and roughly mash.
2. Leave the spinach to cool, then squeeze out excess water with your hands. Scatter the spinach over the bottom of 2 individual or 1 small ovenproof dish leaving two gaps for the eggs. Crack the eggs into the gaps, then season with salt and pepper. Distribute the fish over the spinach and eggs. Spread over the crème fraîche and drizzle with the lemon juice. Loosely spoon over the potatoes, drizzle over the olive oil, then bake for 20-25 mins until the top is crispy and golden and the sauce is bubbling at the sides. Leave to stand for a few mins, then serve straight from the dish.

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

Puzzle

This puzzle is a combination word search and crossword. There are no clues or two-letter words. Just reveal the hidden words by blocking out the incorrect letters. The completed pattern will be symmetrical. Use this fact to help you decide which letters to leave in which ones to leave out. 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.



The winner of the word search in the last newsletter was Mrs E Lappin, of Patrick Stirling Court, Doncaster.

