

JUNE 2024 | **Railway Housing Association**



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Meet Chris

We're delighted to welcome Chris Marshall as our new Chief Operating Officer. Chris has been appointed to lead a team of 25 colleagues in managing our asset portfolio and housing operations. This includes overseeing our day-to-day repairs service, planned maintenance programme, and housing and customer service departments.

Chris has worked in housing since beginning an Apprenticeship in 2002 and before joining Railway he was Head of Housing for Thirteen Group in Middlesbrough, leading a team of 190 people in managing 35,000 homes and serving 70,000 customers.

Ensuring residents' voices are heard has been key throughout his career and he has a passion for ensuring that the experience of residents is excellent, as well as a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and striving to create a workplace and communities where everyone is valued.

Chris says: "Railway Housing Association has a brilliant history and is rightfully proud of being an organisation which was formed back in 1919 to provide homes for heroes."

"I am delighted to have joined the Association and to have taken up a new role which combines property management and housing services, and we will be working hard to ensure we put residents at the heart of the decision-making process now and in the future."

On the Right Track

On the Right Track is our new improvement plan for the next 12 months which is based on four key themes – Our Resident Experience, Our Homes, Our Organisation and Our People. Here, Chris explains how this will benefit our residents.



OUR RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

We are working with an external consultant and our engaged residents to review our approach to resident engagement. You might remember receiving a survey from us in April to ask your views about what's important to you. Thank you to everyone that replied to our survey and this will ultimately enable us to deliver a new strategy setting out how we listen to and engage with our residents, including the setting up of a new resident-led scrutiny committee which will report directly to the Board. We are also looking at improving our complaints process this year as we really value all feedback and we want to ensure that the process is easy and effective.



OUR HOMES

We are now almost 70% through a full stock condition survey of all our properties and once complete this will give us an accurate, fully up-to-date picture of the condition of each and every one of our homes. This will then help to shape future investment plans. We are also developing a new Asset Management Strategy and there will be an opportunity at The Big Conversation in July, as well as through other forms of engagement, to discover what residents expect from our repairs and maintenance service, including how we communicate with you and work with contractors to drive up quality.



OUR ORGANISATION

We are aiming to deliver projects around our strength and governance programme and have also undertaken a health check on our housing management system and how we can improve the value in this area. We are also about to go live with a new asset management system which will contain the information gathered from the stock condition survey.



OUR PEOPLE

This is around ensuring we deliver a really great strategy for our colleagues, including areas such as behaviours and values, equality, diversity and inclusion and our residents will be at the front and centre during this process.

We will, of course, continue to keep you fully updated as we progress the On the Right Track plan and we look forward to including as many of you as possible in this process.



A new lease of life

We have been pleased to welcome new residents to our extended independent living scheme in Hereford.

We added an additional 14 homes at Great Western Court, increasing the number of apartments at the scheme to 44.

The extension, which is linked to the existing scheme built in 1986, has added 12 new one-bedroom apartments, with another two new apartments added within the existing building.

In addition, the communal residents' lounge has been significantly increased in size to provide more space for the various activities which take place at Great Western Court.



The work has also resulted in a larger entrance area, new bicycle/scooter store, additional parking, landscaping, and sprinkler system.

Among the first to move in was 63-year-old Albert Pitcher (left), who has downsized from the two-bedroom flat he owned in Hereford.

I am already getting involved in the social activities and making new friends

He said: "My flat was up four flights of stairs so I was conscious that at some point this was going to become more difficult for me so I applied for one of the new apartments thinking I would spend a while on the waiting list but ended up moving in within a few weeks."

"The apartment is fantastic. The kitchen is twice the size of my old flat and I was able to bring pretty much all of my belongings with me because it is so spacious."

"I was widowed 18 months ago and even though I have the support of my family who all live in Hereford, I was getting lonely but here I am already getting involved in the social activities and making new friends. I couldn't be happier."

Another of the new residents is 83-year-old Susan Lodge (below), who moved into her apartment from a three-bedroom home she says was getting more difficulty for her to maintain.

"I count my lucky stars that I have been able to move into such a lovely place; it's given me a new lease of life."

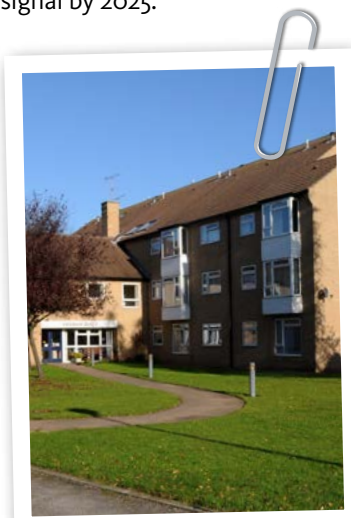


Improving our homes

As part of our planned maintenance programme, we have been carrying out a range of work on our homes and sheltered housing schemes to ensure residents' homes are safe, warm and secure.

This work includes:

- The installation of new fire doors at Paterson House and Forster House in Hull – these doors are designed to withstand fire for 30 minutes and during this critical time, they prevent the spread of smoke and flames allowing residents to escape safely in the event of fire.
- The installation of 60 new composite doors at homes in Hull and Leeds.
- Updating internal communal lighting at North Eastern Court in Gateshead - these lights will stay on in an emergency situation, and if the power goes out. We have also installed energy efficient lights that switch on only when someone is in the space, so that we are not wasting power unnecessarily.
- The installation of communal lighting at Hackworth Court in Stockton.
- Updating all our independent living schemes to receive a digital signal by 2025.



Help us to help you keep safe

Gaining access to all of our homes every 12 months to complete a gas safety check is a legal requirement and helps ensure you are safe and have access to heating and hot water all year round.

We are here to work with you by arranging an appointment that is suitable to you because your safety is our number 1 priority. Please contact us and let us know when you receive the first appointment letter if you need to re-arrange and to prevent further action being taken.

“Over the past few months we have noticed an increase in the number of residents not engaging with us.”

14 missed appointments in April 2024

Each year we send you an appointment for our gas engineer, Andrew Dye, to visit your home and ensure that the gas appliances within your home are safe and working efficiently, however over the past few months we have noticed an increase in the number of residents not engaging with us.

To ensure your safety we have had to take legal action due to missed appointments, so far this year we have had to apply to the County Court for 2 injunctions for a breach of tenancy agreement. This has cost each resident a total of £798.80 in legal fees.

STAY GAS SAFE

SAFETY CHECK

Have your gas appliances safety checked every year.

ALARM

Fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm.

FLAME

Lazy yellow flames could mean your gas appliance has a fault.

ENGINEER

Only use a Gas Safe registered engineer.

A rich heritage

There are many examples of housing schemes which preserve our rich heritage, having been named after people who made significant contributions to the railway industry.

Stephenson Court in Hull, Patrick Stirling Court in Doncaster and Tempest Anderson House in Darlington being just a few examples.

We are now pleased to report that more of our history has been preserved thanks to our Housing Officer Andy Bargewell.

“The sign sparked my interest and it's great that we have now been officially able to preserve another piece of our long history.”

Following a recent visit to see residents living in four properties in Valley Road, Scarborough, he noticed a sign on one of the properties which said 'Whitelaw Cottages'. He subsequently did a little digging online and discovered the following information about them:

They were built under the North Eastern Railway Cottage Homes movement formed in 1919 in the interests of railway staff, and opened on 29th September 1923. By this time the NER had become part of the London & North Eastern Railway and they were opened (and named after) the new company's first chairman, William Whitelaw, grandfather of the former Conservative Deputy Prime Minister of the same name.

WHITELAW COTTAGES

Having learned this and realising that Whitelaw Cottage was not listed as an address on our system, Andy mentioned it to our Chief Executive Matt Sugden and they agreed it would be good to write to the four residents living in Valley Road to see if they would like to have Whitelaw Cottages added to their official address.



One of those who agreed was Susan Bond, who says she is particularly happy for her home – where she has lived for 16 years – to be officially associated with railway history.

She explains: “Several generations of my family worked in the railways, so the industry means a lot to me.

“I wasn't aware of this particular link until Andy mentioned it in his letter to me, so I was very happy to give my blessing to have the name added to my address.

“It's a lovely piece of history.”

Andy said: “The sign sparked my interest and it's great that we have now been officially able to preserve another piece of our long history.”



Hats off

Residents at our newest development, The Laurels in Bishop Auckland, came together to celebrate Easter with a host of activities.

They had an Easter bonnet making competition, as well as competition to decorate hard boiled eggs, both of which were fiercely contested.

There was also an Easter egg raffle, bingo and food and refreshments. Friends and relatives also came along and a great day was had by all.

“The Easter bonnet making competition, as well as competition to decorate hard boiled eggs, were both were fiercely contested.”



Award-winning volunteer

It's not often we get an award-winning volunteer living in one of our properties, so we have been pleased to welcome Paul Brumpton to the Railway Housing Association family.

Paul moved into a flat at our Stephenson Court sheltered housing scheme in June 2023 and given his background, has already become one of our involved residents, whether that's attending scheme meetings or taking part in the various social activities such as bingo and keep fit. He's also organising a dominoes night for residents too.

Before he became a Railway Housing Association resident, Paul lived in a Hull City Council property and volunteered in various capacities during his time as a tenant.

He was part of the Council's Tenant Participation Team for well over 10 years, bringing 40 years' worth of experience on subjects such as landscape gardening (he was a gardener during his working life) and multi-storey living, which he was able to draw on when attending meetings on these subjects.

Due to his wealth of knowledge on gardening, he was part of the judging panel for the Council's Garden Competition which he has really enjoyed, and even now, even though he no longer lives in a council house, he continues to volunteer as a Patch Walker.

“
I like to get involved
and stay because it gets
me out and about and
does me good
”

Paul explains: “I go out every two weeks with a housing officer from the council and we look at area such as gardens, footpaths, trees, and hedges to see if anything needs to be done.

“I now have seven areas to cover so it keeps me busy, which is great because it's one of the reasons why I have always enjoyed volunteer work.”

Paul's involvement with the Council resulted in him being nominated, and winning, an award in the TPAS Engagement Heroes' Volunteer Recognition Scheme, which is about celebrating the work of residents across the country who give their time up to make a difference to housing services, communities, and people.

Hull born and bred, Paul is very proud of his city and says he likes to give something back, with one of his other regular activities being litter picking, although he says that's not something he needs to worry about at Stephenson Court.

“I have been very impressed with my home and with Railway Housing Association in general, and am really happy here,” he says.

“I like to get involved because it gets me out and about and does me good, and hopefully I can contribute further within Railway Housing Association in the future.”



The Tech-Savvy Nonagenarian

At the age of 99, Lilian Maclean has set herself a goal – and it's not related to becoming a centenarian in less than a year's time.

Rather, her goal is ensuring she can take part in the celebration of the birth of her fifth great-grandchild in August this year, even though he or she will be born thousands of miles away in America.

And that's because this tech-savvy nonagenarian plans to see the newest member of her family through the wonder of video communications.

She's already an old hand (if you pardon the pun) at this, having watched her journalist grandson David get married to his American wife via the Zoom app on her iPad.

“It was certainly a different experience, but I had the best seat in the house,” jokes Lilian.

Lilian is living proof that age is no barrier when it comes to technology. She is currently on her second iPad, which she uses to email, take photographs, do quizzes, and watch the occasional wedding.

The iPad came in particularly useful recently when Lilian saw a helicopter land in the football field which she can see from her flat at our Tempest Anderson House sheltered housing scheme in Darlington.

“It's not something which happens everyday so I took a photograph and I later discovered it was the air ambulance,” adds Lilian.

“When my family gave me the iPad, I didn't think I would be able to use it, but I have been around computers for a long time and went on a course when they were still fairly new, and this is just a smaller version.

“Now I wouldn't be without it, and I also have a Kindle too!”

Lilian moved into Tempest Anderson House when it opened in 1983 so is now easily our longest-standing resident at the scheme.



“
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have a Kindle too!”
”

She recalls: “My husband John and I were living in our own home close to Tempest Anderson House and we were looking to downsize, the only problem was that even though I had a connection to the railways I was still a few months away from turning 60 and that was the age you had to be to be considered for a home.

“Given I was so close to my birthday an exception was made but we were told we had to wait to see if we were going to be given a flat or one of the nearby bungalows because another couple had the first choice.

“They chose the bungalow and by complete chance, it turned out to be my former boss Mr Blackburn who I hadn't see for 40 years.

“We were happy though because we got what we always called the penthouse flat!”

After leaving school, Lilian worked as a shorthand typist at Bank Top House, where ironically Railway Housing Association's former head office was situated.

When the Second World War broke out, she enlisted in the WAAF where she learned to be a wireless operator using Morse Code. This took to her places like Wiltshire, Norfolk, and Scotland, before she returned to her old job in 1947.

Lilian has also worked in a factory making cardboard boxes and a record shop, in between bringing up her two children.

John sadly died of cancer 15 years ago, so her flat of 40 years, understandably holds lots of lovely memories for her.

She says: “I was the social secretary for two years and it's good that we still have activities, although I find it a little more difficult to take part given my reduced mobility, but it's always been a nice place to live.”

Looking forward to the next big event, after the birth of her great grandchild of course, Lilian originally didn't want too much of fuss, although she has relented a little.

“I might put a message on the noticeboard saying people are welcome to pop in and there will be a drink waiting for them,” she says.

We don't think there will be a shortage of people queuing up to wish her a happy birthday!

Your rent and service charges changing from 29th July 2024

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly and we're really grateful to all of our residents and we care about you and your home. From 29th July 2024 your rent and service charges will change and most rents will increase by 7.7%.

Why we need to increase your rent

The price of everyday items continues to go up and the cost of living remains a challenge for many people. Although inflation has started to slow down, we are still seeing much higher prices for the things that we need to buy to deliver services to you.

The cost of buying building materials and the things that we need to repair your homes has increased, and although inflation has slowed, the prices of those things has still continued to increase.

We've also listened to your feedback and we know that you want more investment in your homes. We know that we need to deliver more new kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, doors, windows and roof works and we've paused our development programme of new homes to help us maximise the amount we can invest in our existing homes.

How your rent is set

As a housing association, we are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) which ensures we set our rents in a certain way. This is called the Rent Standard. The RSH currently allow housing associations to increase rents by the same rate as Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation based on the rate in September of the previous year plus an additional 1%. CPI inflation in September 2023 was 6.7% and when you add the 1% this adds up to 7.7%.

Last year, you might remember that your rent increase was 7% and that was because inflation was very high at 10.1% and the government capped the increase last year.

Service Charges

If you have a service charge attached to your rent, this pays for the additional services that you receive, such as grounds maintenance or lighting to a communal area. Service charges are calculated to recover the actual cost of delivering those services, and therefore you may see an increase to some of those charges. This is because inflation has continued to increase, along with the increased cost of providing these services.

Housing benefit and Universal Credit

If you receive housing benefit or Universal Credit, the amount that you will receive will also increase to help you to pay your rent.

What's next

If you're worried about paying your rent, please contact us as soon as possible on 0800 028 7428 so that we can talk this through with you and offer you any support that you may need.

You will shortly be receiving your formal rent increase notification letter from us.

If you receive Housing Benefit, we will notify the Housing Benefit Team at your local council on your behalf.

If you receive Universal Credit, you will need to log onto your online Journal and update your rent amount. Please ensure that you do this on, or immediately after 29th July 2024 as you are not able to do it beforehand.

If you pay by standing order, you will need to notify your bank of your new rent amount so that they can adjust payment. If you pay by direct debit, we will adjust your direct debit for you.

The Big Conversation

By now you should all have received a booklet through the door inviting you to take part in our Big Conversation event which takes place at Darlington Arena on Wednesday 10th July.

We will be contacting everyone who has applied and are looking forward to welcoming you on the day.

The Big Conversation is an exciting new start to resident engagement and putting the views of people who live in our homes at the heart of decision making.

This year's event will be a little different from previous years. The day will start with the chance for you to speak informally to Railway colleagues and some of our partner organisations.

Then, you will hear from our Chief Executive Matt Sugden about our priorities for your homes and services. We will also be asking for your help to shape our new Resident Engagement Strategy – so that we can listen and act.

We want to hear about your views and experiences of our Repairs Service and what's really important to you, and you will also have a chance to hear about our new and exciting Residents' Committee as well.

“The Big Conversation is an exciting new start to resident engagement.”



Grounds Maintenance

Our existing grounds maintenance contract has come to the end of its term, therefore over the past few months we have carried out a procurement exercise which allowed us to test the market and ensure we are providing value for money to our residents.

We are pleased to announce that from 1st July 2024 we will have a new grounds maintenance contract in place.

We listened to your feedback regarding the frequency of the grass cutting visits and the visits will now take place every 2 weeks during the summer months. Please see the frequency table.

Frequency Schedule Table

Lawn Care Summer Months 1st April to 31st October	14 Visits
Lawn Care Winter Months 1st November to 31st March	7 Visits
Pruning of shrubs and hedges	3 Visits outside of nesting season
Weeding flower beds	9 (one visit per month from 1st April to 31st October)
Leaf Clearance	12 Visits
Removal of Moss and Weeds	Every Visit
Removal of litter	12 Visits

How will this affect you?

If you are included in the grounds maintenance contract we will be writing to you all individually over the next couple of weeks to provide you with some more information.

Photography competition

It's that time of the year again when we ask you to get your cameras out and start snapping if you would like to enter our annual report photography competition.

The competition continues to go from strength to strength and because of the quality of the pictures you submit, it's getting more difficult by the year to choose the 12 photographs to grace the calendar.

We are once again looking for photographs (landscape only please) that will appeal to a wide audience in the North East, Yorkshire, Hull and East Riding, Cumbria and Herefordshire.

For example, wildlife, a local landscape scheme, a local landmark, a community event or gardens.

If you would like to enter please email the pictures in JPEG format at the highest possible resolution (size) which should ideally be at least 1MB per picture to: info@railwayha.co.uk by the closing date of **Friday 12th July**.

12 pictures will be selected for the calendar with the overall winner having their photograph on the front cover and winning £100 of Love to Shop vouchers.

Happy snapping!



“ We are once again looking for photographs (landscape only please) that will appeal to a wide audience ”



Quiz

The Year so Far

January

1. Who became the fifth country to achieve a soft landing on the Moon, with its SLIM mission?
2. Which two Premier League teams were charged with breaking financial fair play rules?
3. Which film won five awards at the 81st Golden Globe awards?
4. Which actor who played Hutch in Starsky & Hutch passed away this month?

February

1. Who became the First Minister of Northern Ireland, marking the first time that the position has been held by an Irish nationalist?
2. Which team won the American football Superbowl?
3. Who won the EFL cup, beating Chelsea 1-0 in the last minute of extra time?
4. Why was 29th February different?

March

1. Which Conservative MP defected to the Reform Party?
2. Who announced that she was diagnosed with cancer following recent abdominal surgery?
3. In which American city did a bridge collapse after being struck by a container ship?
4. Which Royal made his first public appearance since being diagnosed with cancer?

April

1. Which horse won the Grand National?
2. John Tinniswood from Liverpool officially became the world's oldest living man at what age?
3. Which former NFL player and actor who latterly became known for being acquitted for the murders of his wife and her friend died this month?

4. What is the name of the venue in Manchester which had to cancel several high profile shows due to not being ready?

May

1. Who won the Premier League for the 4th consecutive year?
2. Who officially stepped down from his role as manager of Liverpool Football Club?
3. Who was confirmed as the leader of The Scottish National Party?
4. Who won the World Snooker Championships?

Answers - January: 1. Japan | 2. Nottingham Forest and Everton | 3. Oppenheimer | 4. David Soul.
February: 1. Michelle O'Neill | 2. Kansas City Chiefs | 3. Liverpool | 4. It was a Leap Year.
March: 1. Lee Anderson | 2. Catherine, Princess of Wales | 3. Baltimore | 4. King Charles.
April: 1. I am Maximus | 2. 111 | 3. OJ Simpson | 4. Co-op Live.
May: 1. King Charles.
June: 1. Kyren Wilson

Wordsearch

Beatles Albums

REVOLVER
HELP
MAGICAL MYSTERY
SECOND ALBUM



THE WHITE ALBUM
SGT PEPPERS
LONG TALL SALLY
LET IT BE
RUBBER SOUL
ABBEY ROAD
TWIST AND SHOUT
PLEASE PLEASE ME

M	A	G	I	C	A	L	M	Y	S	T	E	R	Y
T	W	I	S	T	A	N	D	S	H	O	U	T	T
I	S	T	E	S	R	E	P	P	E	P	T	G	S
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O	R	U	B	B	E	R	S	O	U	L	L	O	L

RECIPE

Eton Mess

Ingredients

- 600g strawberries
- 2 tbsp icing sugar
- 600ml double cream
- 5 ready-made meringue nests
- Mint for garnish



Method

1. Put 150g/5½oz of the strawberries into a blender or food processor with ½ tablespoon of the icing sugar. Pulse to form a smooth purée. Halve or quarter the remaining strawberries into bite-size pieces.
2. Whip the double cream and remaining 1½ tablespoons of icing sugar together until soft peaks form when you remove the whisk (they should almost hold their shape).
3. To assemble, crumble 4 of the meringues and add to the cream along with all the berries. Fold in lightly, then very briefly stir in the strawberry purée to make swirls in the cream (as you spoon the mess into bowls it will ripple more). Divide between 6 bowls or glasses, crush the final meringue over the top and eat immediately.



Have your contact details changed?

If you have changed your mobile number or email address please contact us with your new details.

[www.twitter.com/railwayha](https://twitter.com/railwayha) www.facebook.com/railwayhousingassociation

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