



## Painting with numbers

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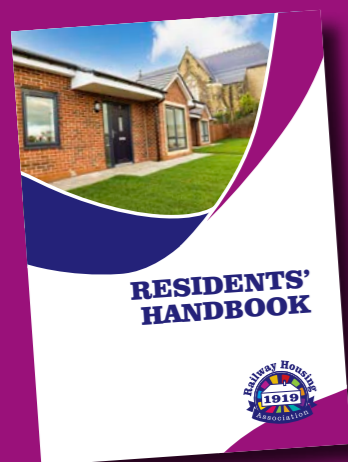
## Out of hours number

You should now all be aware that from 1st April 2023, the number needed to report an emergency repair outside of normal office hours number has changed to 0300 373 2803.

This call will be taken by Johnnie Johnson Housing (also known as Astraline). This service is available to all residents between the hours of 4pm – 9am Monday to Friday, as well as weekends, bank holidays, Christmas shut down period and staff training days.

**Emergency repair out of hours new number is: 0300 373 2803**

You will need to provide them with your name, address, contact number and details of the emergency repair. A contractor will be contacted to attend the repair and make good the next working day. Please refer to Page 6 of your Residents' Handbook as to what is classed as emergency repair.



## A letter from Matt

Hello and welcome to your latest edition of RHA News. It's a fantastic edition with lots of interesting and informative content. I really hope that you enjoy reading it.

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you all, having joined Railway Housing Association on 3rd April 2023, as the Chief Executive. Firstly, I wanted to thank my predecessor, Anne Rowlands, for her years of service to Railway Housing. Anne has done a great job and has really helped me settle into my new role. I am delighted to have joined such a resident focused organisation and I am excited to get out and about, listening and introducing myself to as many of you as possible.

I was born and brought up in Yorkshire and have lived in North Yorkshire for the past 8 years.

A little bit about me - I have worked in social housing for over 17 years across the country as an Executive and Non-Executive Director predominantly for a large, national housing association. I was born and brought up in Yorkshire and have lived in North Yorkshire for the past 8 years.

“It really matters to me that we hear your thoughts around the service that we provide”

I know that we are living in really challenging times, especially with the cost of living crisis, and I will be working with my colleagues to ensure that we do the very best that we can to support you. It really matters to me that we hear your thoughts around the service that we provide and what we can do to improve our offer. Please do feel free to get in touch with us or join some of our many resident engagement opportunities. I look forward to hearing your views.

**Matt Sugden**  
Chief Executive



## New homes in Hereford

**Work is now well underway on the extension of our Great Western Court sheltered housing scheme in Hereford.**

Scheduled for completion by the end of the year, we are adding 14 additional homes to the scheme in Canonmoor Court.

This represents an investment of over £2 million, including funding of £600,000 from Homes England, and will provide much needed homes in Hereford for older people.

Two new one-bedroom apartments are being built within the existing building, and a two-storey extension will provide another 12 one-bedroom apartments.

Right: New flat above communal lounge  
Below: Great Western Court



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

“Meeting the need for older person's accommodation in Hereford.”

It will also provide a larger entrance area, new bicycle/mobility scooter store, additional parking, landscaping and sprinkler system.

The new homes will be advertised for rent via Herefordshire Council's Home Point lettings scheme and let to people aged 60 and over who are registered on our waiting list or nominated by the local council.



## Making a difference

**From 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, more than 200 residents told us their opinions and made a difference:**

YOU SAID	WE DID
An annual satisfaction survey required by the regulator will be costly and unnecessary	We passed your comments on to the Regulator of Social Housing
The manufacturer's user instructions for new central heating boilers are in small font, technical and difficult to understand	Contractors who are fitting a number of new central heating boilers will now provide a plain English one page guide
We want to know when our Housing Officer or Tenancy Services Officer are on leave	A notice is now displayed in this sheltered scheme to let residents know when a member of staff is on leave, with details of how to contact the other member of staff
Contractors sometimes ring up or visit our home before we know anything about the work that has been planned	Residents will be told of any planned or cyclical maintenance to be carried out in their home, including the name of the contractor, before the contractor gets in touch
We need a store room for mobility scooters	A communal room at this sheltered scheme has been redesignated for the storage of mobility scooters
There are problems with the window cleaning service	A meeting was held with the window cleaning company to discuss and resolve the problems
We would like a heated towel rail instead of a radiator to be fitted when bathrooms are renewed	Heated towel rails will be installed during bathroom renewals, in bathrooms with sufficient room for a towel rail and a radiator

If you want to make a difference and help improve the association's services, please call Sahar Omar on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or email [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or contact us via social media. You could join the Board, the Residents' Scrutiny Panel, a Focus Group or tell us your views from the comfort of your own home by joining the Residents' Forum.

### Do we meet the standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing?

THE STANDARDS	DO WE MEET THEM?	EXAMPLES/EVIDENCE OF HOW WE MEET THE STANDARD
Governance & Financial Viability – are we well managed and have enough money to meet our responsibilities for the foreseeable future?	Yes	We are currently assessed by the Regulator of Social Housing as meeting the highest possible rating for governance, and complying with the financial viability standard.
Value for Money – do we provide good quality homes and services at a reasonable cost?	Yes	Our costs are low compared to other similar landlords, as assessed by an independent company called HouseMark. Our annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 include details of how we compare to other similar landlords and what we plan to do to improve value for money. We aim to save 5% of our operating costs each year without affecting the quality of services. In 2021 we made savings of 2.8% (£124,726).

THE STANDARDS	DO WE MEET THEM?	EXAMPLES/EVIDENCE OF HOW WE MEET THE STANDARD
Rent – do the rents we charge meet government requirements?	Yes	All rents are charged in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. This is confirmed by an independent audit of rents.
Tenant Involvement & Empowerment – does we provide appropriate information to residents; deal with complaints well; offer a good range of opportunities for residents to influence how we work; and treat all residents fairly and with respect?	Yes	<p>Lots of information is provided for residents 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>90% of complaints were resolved at the first stage in 2021/22.</p> <p>Residents are encouraged to 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. We tailor services to meet the specific needs of individual residents, for example, using large print, translation/interpretation services, and providing specialist smoke alarms for hard of hearing. At 31 March 2022, information on individual needs had been provided by 97% of our residents.</p>
Home – do we 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 our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard</p> <p>At 31 March 2022, 98% of residents were satisfied with the repairs service.</p> <p>91% of repairs were completed at the first visit, up from 89% in the previous year.</p> <p>95.7% of asbestos, fire, gas, electrical, water and lifts safety checks were completed on time, compared to 88% in the previous year.</p>
Tenancy – does we 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 council for applicants on their waiting list.</p> <p>The average number of days taken to re-let homes was 45.67 days in 2021/22, compared to 38.92 days in 2020/21. This was because it took longer than usual to repair homes before the new resident moved in due to difficulties getting materials and labour.</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 – do we 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 neighbourhood?	Yes	93% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood.



## Very Busy Bees!

A group of friends, including two of our residents, have celebrated their 40th year raising money for local charities.

Mavis Ewbank and Maureen Horner (who both live in our Plevna Mews sheltered housing scheme in Shildon pictured above), are known as The Busy Bee Girls, along with Nora Brewster, Thelma Cook, Doris Humble, Pat West, Marion Henderson, Sheila Bird, Gillian Bird and Joanne Bird.

Between them, they have been raising money for charities and local good causes since 1983. Among those who have benefited from their fundraising efforts include the Pioneering Care Partnership (which raised £140,000 for a hydrotherapy pool) and the Butterwick Hospice.

The Busy Bees do table top sales, home baking, bus trips and buying and selling items, all to raise as much money as possible.

Plevna Mews has become one of the main 'venues' for their fundraising efforts, hosting events and with great support from residents who are always keen to make donations.

The Busy Bees say: "Plevna Mews boost our charity with donations and sales in the communal area and they are simply the best."

"Thank you to everyone who support and help those in need."



Staff with the IIP award.

## Hi Ho, Silver Lining

We were pleased to have retained our silver standard Investors in People (IIP) status.

This followed a re-assessment on the management and development of staff.

The IIP assessor noted that the Association:

- Has well-established and effective people management practices
- Manages performance well to achieve its business plans
- Keeps its values of being caring, fair, efficient, open and trustworthy, at the heart of what it does
- Looks beyond the current business environment to learn from the outside world to improve performance.

Recommendations for further improvement included:

- Improving internal communications
- Increasing the involvement of staff in decisions that have an impact on them and their work

- Encouraging staff to work more with their colleagues across the organisation, sharing information, experience and best practice
- Developing change resilience and stamina within the workforce, in readiness for future challenges.

Matt Sugden, Chief Executive of Railway Housing Association, said: "Given the circumstances of the last few years, we are absolutely delighted to have retained our IIP silver status."

"Whether it was the challenges posed by the pandemic, or other factors such as moving into a new head office, we never faltered in our commitment to encourage and develop our staff, and this can only benefit our residents."

Paul Devoy, CEO of Investors in People, said: "We'd like to congratulate Railway Housing Association on their silver accreditation. It puts them in fine company with a host of organisations that understand the value of people."

## Snapping up the prize

Within this newsletter you will find a leaflet on our 2023/24 annual report photography competition.

The competition is going from strength to strength and we hope as many of you (or your family) as possible are able to submit pictures this year.

The chances are that many of you will have this year's calendar on the wall and you will see the winning entry was submitted by Louise James, whose in-laws Philip and Sheila Beaumont live in one of our properties in Darlington.

Her picture of a wildflower meadow was the favourite of the judging panel which is made up of people on our Residents' Forum and Focus Groups.

With the £100 she received for winning the competition, Louise has been able to indulge one of her other hobbies – buying Harry Potter Lego.

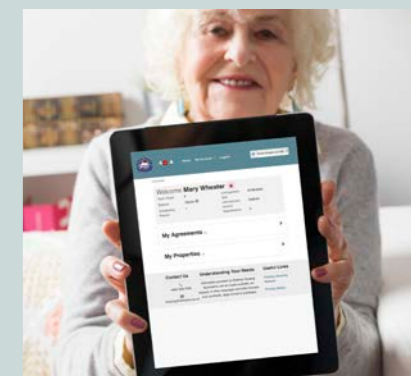
Pictured: Louise with Philip and Sheila Beaumont.



Louise says: "I have always enjoyed taking pictures and like everyone I had more time on my hands during lockdown so I did more walking, and I would always have my Nikon camera or iPhone with me."

"I was very happy with the picture I took so knowing about the competition, through my mother and father-in-law, I entered, and I was stunned but delighted when I discovered I had won."

We look forward to seeing your entries later this year.



## Residents' Portal Prize Draw Winners

Winners of £30 each in the prize draw for signing up to use the Residents' Portal on our website -

- Emma Watson, Hexham
- Ian McKane, Hull
- And one other resident who wished to remain anonymous.

We would still invite residents who have not yet signed up to the Portal to do so if you can. It is tablet and mobile phone friendly and enables you to do many things, including reporting non-urgent repairs, check your rent balance, pay your rent, download your account statements and much more.

### How to register

To register you will need your date of birth, surname, agreement reference number (which is on your tenancy agreement) and activation code. If you need a reminder of your agreement reference number or activation code, please contact us on **0800 028 748** as we will be happy to help.

# Painting the town red

**A chance meeting in unusual circumstances led Ruth Fitzpatrick to have a successful career as an artist, with her work now on display across the world.**

Ruth, who lives in one of our homes in Doncaster, is an artist who specialises in landscape painting using oil and water colours.

She has been able to make a living by selling her work to people living in countries like the USA, Germany and France, despite always considering it more of a hobby, but this may not have happened had it not been for a job she was doing in the 1980s.

Below: Ruth with some of her work when she lived in Ireland.



Ruth takes up the story: "I was a nurse for 38 years and then ended up working in southern Ireland at a refuge for drug addicts.

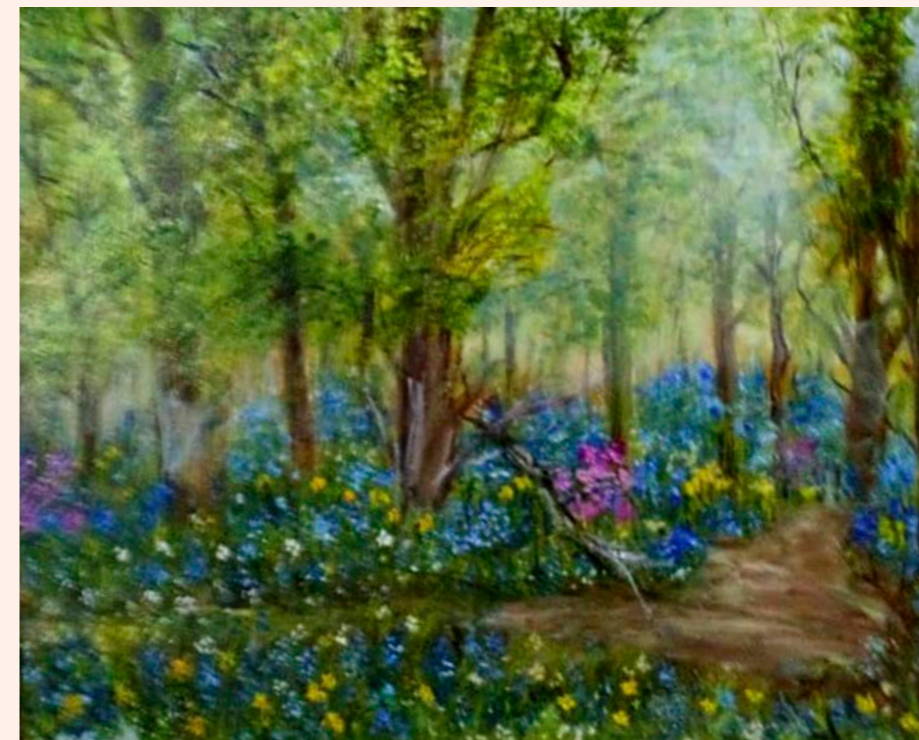
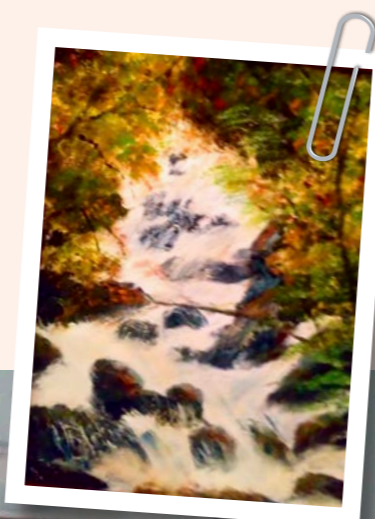
"I was a counsellor and one of the woman I supported was an art teacher who knew I liked art myself and she said she would teach me how to paint.

“I said I couldn’t afford to buy all the equipment needed but she bought me everything

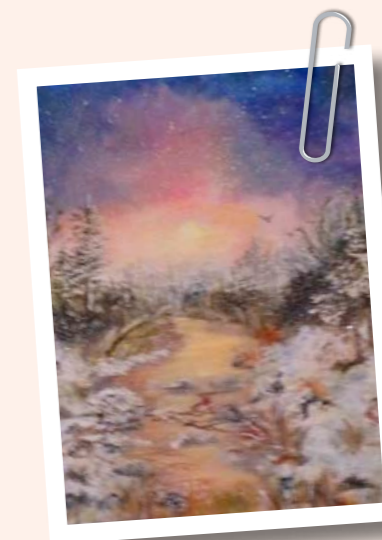
”

"I said I couldn’t afford to buy all the equipment needed but she bought me everything, which was very kind of her, and the first-ever picture I painted sold for £80 to a local café, which was so exciting.

"The art teacher said I can’t teach you anything and everything happened from there!"



Bottom Left: Ruth with one of her most recent pieces of work.



Many tourists visited the part of Ireland where Ruth lived, so this meant people ended up buying her work over the years and taking it back with them.

Ruth adds: "There were obviously a lot of American visitors, so I think my work is probably in most states of the USA, even in Alaska!

Ruth came back to her native Doncaster around 15 years ago and was delighted when she was offered a Railway Housing Association home.

“I have always taken the view that it’s never too late to take on a new challenge.

”

She adds: "I will always be grateful to Railway Housing Association for providing me a place to live near my family and always treating me with care and respect."

Describing her home as "like being a gallery", even at the age of 84 she continues to paint, although now it's even more for her own pleasure.

Ruth adds: "I once won a competition to paint something to celebrate 100 years of the Franciscan monks in Ireland, and on the back of this I was commissioned to do some work which I was paid £1,000 for, which was incredible and it helped me pay for furniture for my home.

"I have had the time of my life painting, whether that is painting woodland, mountains, or a beach. I have always viewed it as pastime, something I love doing, but to know people have been willing to pay for my work is amazing.

"I have always taken the view that it's never too late to take on a new challenge. You don't retire but refire as it keeps you young!"

# Your views on our services

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 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.

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 process.

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.

## 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. In 2021/22, 90% of complaints were resolved at the first stage.

## STAGE 2

At stage 2 a Director will review and investigate your complaint. If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome 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.housing-ombudsman.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 process. 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

One change was made because of complaints received in 2021/22. The information we provide on the right to compensation for home improvements made by residents has been amended to clarify that only the tenant has the right to make a claim.

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number of complaints received	30	32	47	40

“Would you like to compliment us on a job well done? In 2021/22 we received 12 compliments. Most were about our repairs service but we also received compliments about our customer service.

“Thank you for a speedy repair. Your contractor who did the job was very good”

**Mr O, Harris Street, Darlington**

“Wonderful service, thank you very much”

**Mrs J, Martin Cheeseman Court, York**

“Thank you for your quick response to my broken boiler”

**Mrs B, Wenlock Road, South Tyneside**

“Thank you for clearing the rubbish so quickly”

**Mrs S, Stephenson Court, Hull**

“The service I have received from everyone has been exceptional and I cannot thank the Association enough”

**Mrs M, Hackworth Court, Stockton on Tees**

“Thank you for the new fence. I'm delighted with it and feel much safer”

**Mrs K, West Auckland Road, Darlington**

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

Subject of complaint	Number received in 2021/22
Repairs and maintenance*	19
Garden maintenance	3
Running costs of heating	2
Customer services	1
Parking dispute	1
Compensation for resident's own home improvements	1
Vermin	1
Anti-social behaviour	1
Mutual exchange	1
TOTAL	30

**77% of complaints were fully or partially upheld**

No complaints about our services were investigated by the Housing Ombudsman.

\*The most common reason for complaints about the repairs service was outstanding repairs/the time taken to complete repairs. We will try to do more to check on outstanding repairs and keep residents informed of progress.

How we compare to other landlords in 2021/22	Railway Housing Association	Other similar landlords
Number of stage 1 complaints per 1000 homes	18.8	23.3
Percentage of complaints responded to within target timescale	80%	92.2%

## Neighbour complaints

In 2021/22, we received 2 complaints from residents about their neighbour, one about noise and the other about verbal abuse.

We responded to both complaints within 10 working days and resolved the problems by visiting each neighbour to discuss their behaviour.

It was not necessary to take any legal action to resolve the problems.

	Railway Housing Association	Similar size housing associations in North of England & Midlands
Number of neighbour complaints per 1000 homes in 2021/22	1.3	22.4

## Know Your Rights

A new website, funded by the government provides information and training for residents on their rights and how to make complaints.

It offers advice on and encourages residents to get involved in how their homes are managed.

It offers advice on and encourages residents to get involved in how their homes are managed.

Free online and face-to-face training events on subjects including knowing your rights, damp and mould and anti-social behaviour are being offered in May and June 2023. The face-to-face events are being held around the country including Newcastle, Leeds and Birmingham

For more information and to book a place at the events - [www.fourmillionhomes.org](http://www.fourmillionhomes.org)

## Brenda's story

Brenda Flynn lived in one of our homes in Darlington for almost 60 years before recently moving to live with her son in the town. During that time, she was one of our most involved residents, including serving on our Focus Groups and being Chair of our Scrutiny Panel. She definitely fulfilled the role of being a 'constructive critical friend' to the Association, holding us to account and suggesting many improvements to services that we implemented, whilst at the same time being extremely supportive. Her input will be greatly missed. Here is Brenda's story.

"I was born and grew up in Greater Manchester but moved to Darlington in 1963 when my late husband George, who worked for British Rail, got a job as the Chief Clerk of the District Engineers Office in Darlington.

"We moved into 43 Auckland Oval, when the estate was managed by the British Rail Property Board, based in York, with our three (then four) children. The estate had been built in the early 1920's to provide housing, mainly for the workforce of the nearby Faverdale Wagon Works.

"In the early 1980's, the estate was transferred to the North Eastern Railway Cottage Homes which, soon after, became Railway Housing Association. In 1991, with all our children having left home, we were able to down-size to a newly-modernised home at 32 Auckland Oval.

"George became well-known in Darlington as a local historian who wrote several books and conducted Council-sponsored guided walks around the town. We volunteered for the local branch of the Workers' Educational Association, both serving terms on the committee as Chair. I have also done voluntary work at the Darlington Railway Museum.



"I would recommend becoming involved in how the Association is run to anyone who may be interested."

In 1974, I returned to the world of work, spending 17 years overall at the Civic Theatre (now the Hippodrome) in various roles - front-of-house; box office; administration - with a break between 1978-84, when I worked in the wages' office in Binns, the local branch of the House of Fraser. At one point, I was pressed into service as a theatre dresser and worked with such actors as Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray and Susie Blake. I used to boast that I had been paid to remove Michael Denison's trousers nightly.

"During my time at the theatre, from which I retired in 1997, I acted as shop steward for two trade unions (but not at the same time). In my spare time, I researched my family history (and still do).

"I became a Focus Group member soon after they were set up and became a member of the Scrutiny Panel when it

was established in early 2011. One of my last official duties as Chair of the Panel was to meet and talk to the four short-listed candidates for the post of Chief Executive.

"There has been steady progress under the Association and many positive improvements under Anne Rowlands' leadership, and I am pleased to have been able to play my part over the years.

"I will miss being part of RHA's resident involvement because it helped me to get to know many of the staff and other residents and I would recommend becoming involved in how the Association is run to anyone who may be interested.

"I should also like to wish Matt, the new Chief Executive, the very best of luck in his new role. Working with him would have been a new challenge and a pleasure."



## Safeguarding

Residents who are members of the Focus Group recently discussed what we do to help and protect adults who may be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation. This can include physical abuse, domestic violence including honour based violence, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial/material abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse, neglect, and acts of omission and self-neglect.

We take all allegations seriously. We will listen to and act on any report or allegation of abuse, no matter who the alleged perpetrator and victim are.

We will not investigate it or judge whether or not abuse has occurred because this is the responsibility of the local council and/or police.

The victim's wishes will always be taken into account but we have a duty to report incidences of suspected or actual abuse to the relevant local authority. If the victim doesn't agree to this then we will ask the council and/or police for advice without telling them who the victim is. If we have to tell the council and/or police more details so that they can protect the victim and/or deal with a crime then we will let the victim know that we are going to do this.

Help with contacting support services such as Hourglass (formerly Action on Elder Abuse) and Victim Support will be offered to the victim.

"We will listen to and act on any report or allegation of abuse, no matter who the alleged perpetrator and victim are."

All members of our staff who will be working with adults at risk must have Disclosure and Barring Service checks to find out if they have any convictions, police cautions, reprimands or warnings that make them unsuitable for this work.

If you are worried that you or someone you know may be being taken advantage of, neglected or abused, please call us on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or email [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk)

## Priority Services Register



The Priority Services Register is a free service provided by electric, gas, water and telephone companies to help anyone who would have particular difficulties if there was a temporary fault or cut in the service, for example an electricity power cut or a burst water mains pipe.

The service would mean that you could receive priority help in an emergency such as bottled water delivered to your home if you couldn't collect it; advanced notice of planned power cuts; bills and other information in large print, braille, audio or sent to someone you nominate for example a relative or carer.

You may be able to sign up for the service if you are of pensionable age, disabled or have a long term medical condition, recovering from injury, pregnant or have young children, have a hearing or visual impairment, have extra communication needs, use medical equipment that needs a power supply, have poor or no sense of smell, would struggle to answer the door or get help in an emergency, or are in another vulnerable situation.

### Free to register

To register for this free service, contact your electric, gas, water and telephone companies.

# Rent update

The government had said that the rents we charge could increase each year until 2025 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. The additional 1% is to help landlords build more new homes.

However, this year the rate of inflation was extraordinarily high at 10.1% and would have meant that residents would have faced rent increases of 11.1%; and those living in shared ownership homes would have faced an increase of 15%.

The government consulted with housing associations and residents and decided that social and affordable rents should not be increased by more than 7% for 2023/24. We have also decided to limit the increase for shared owners to 7%.

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We consulted with residents who are Focus Group members, about our budget for 2023/24, including the rent increase

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We consulted with residents who are Focus Group members, about our budget for 2023/24, including the rent increase, to make sure that their views were taken into account before the rent increase is made.

We know that although the rent increase of 7% is below the rate of inflation, any increase in rent will be difficult for many residents at a time of rising prices in essentials such as food and energy bills. However, we need to set rents at a level that means we can continue to repair and improve homes, carry out essential safety checks and works, and stay financially viable. Our costs are increasing at a significantly higher rate than inflation, especially for services such as repairs and maintenance, so the limit on rent increases means that our income will not increase in line with our costs. Our spending will need to be restricted to make sure that the association continues to be financially viable.

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. Any surplus is invested in repairing and improving homes and services.

Most of the rents that we charge are Social Rents, which are the lowest cost rents available and significantly lower than rents in the private sector. We recently made the difficult decision to pause the building of new homes so the limited funds that we have can be used to continue to improve the energy efficiency of solid walls homes with external cladding, new windows and the installation of solar panels.

We are committed to providing the best possible value for money for every pound of rent that we receive and in recent years we have aimed to make savings of 5% of our operating costs without affecting the quality of service we provide to residents. There is more information about how your rent is spent shown in the annual report calendar that you received, and a copy is also available on our website.

“

We are a not-for-profit charitable housing association and increasing rents is always a difficult decision

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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 £82.38, the proposed rent increase from 31 July 2023 will be £5.77 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 work hard to minimise increases in service charges but these are likely to be significant this year due to the rising costs of energy bills and some maintenance services.

We will write to give you one month's notice before the increase is made to your rent; and any increase in service charges will be detailed in the letter.

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 7% but if the Rent Officer sets a lower rent then we will charge you the rent set by the Rent Officer.

## What do I need to do?

If we receive housing benefit to pay your rent, we will let your local council know about the rent increase so you do not need to do anything. However, if the housing benefit is paid directly to you, you should let your local council know about the rent increase.

If you receive Universal Credit, you will need to update your on-line journal with the rent increase. If you don't have an online journal, please call the Department for Works and Pensions to let them know your rent is increasing so that your Universal Credit is increased to cover the new rent.

If you pay your rent by direct debit, we will update this to the new rent so you do not need to do anything.

If you pay your rent by standing order, you will need to update the standing order amount to the new rent.

We understand that you are also facing increases in the cost of fuel, food and other household bills. If you are struggling financially please call us as soon as possible on freephone number 0800 0287 428. We can help with payment plans, checking if you are entitled to benefits, budgeting advice, debt management, and putting you in touch with organisations and charities who can provide help and support -

- **Citizens Advice**  
Visit: [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://citizensadvice.org.uk)  
Tel: 0800 1448848
- **Nation Debtline**  
Visit: [www.nationaldebtline.org](https://www.nationaldebtline.org)  
Tel: 0800 240 4420
- **Turn 2 Us**  
Visit: [turn2us.org.uk](https://turn2us.org.uk)
- **Step Change**  
Visit: [stepchange.org](https://stepchange.org)  
Tel: 0800 138 1111
- **Money and Pensions Service**  
Visit: [moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk](https://moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk)  
Tel: 0800 138 7777

A new government webpage provides useful information on support that is available – [www.helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk](https://www.helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk)

Martin Lewis, Money Saving Expert offers independent advice on how to cut costs – [www.moneysavingsexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingsexpert.com)

Lightening Reach is a free online service that can quickly and easily connect you to financial support from various sources including grants from charities, funding from your local council or support with your utility bills - [www.lightningreach.org](https://www.lightningreach.org)

Use [www.warmwelcome.uk](https://www.warmwelcome.uk) to find a local free, safe, warm place. Some offer free drinks, food, homework clubs, activities and support for all ages

Find your local foodbank by looking on your local council's website or [www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/](https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/)

If you are pregnant and/or have children under 4 years and in receipt of certain benefits such as Universal Credit, Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, you may be able to get payments for fresh food, milk and vitamins under NHS Healthy Start – [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)  
Tel: 0300 330 7010

**Water Bills** – your local water company may offer a social tariff for your water supply and/or financial support if you are behind with your payments. For example, Yorkshire Water has a social tariff called WaterSupport, which is based on the number of people living in your home and their income. They also have a charity called the Yorkshire Water Community Trust that can provide financial help.

Save up to £150 a year on your broadband - twenty broadband providers including BT, Community Fibre, EE, G-Net, Hyperoptic, KCOM, NOW, Sky, NOW, Virgin Media, and Vodafone have special rates for customers who get benefits such as:

- Guarantee credit element of Pension Credit
- Income Support
- Jobseekers' allowance
- Universal Credit
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Care Leavers Support
- Housing benefit
- Personal Independent Payment
- Attendance Allowance

Save up to £150 a year on your broadband

# Don't Miss Out

If you are of state pension age you may be able to claim an extra £60 a week.

Pension Credit is a tax free, means tested benefit for retired people on low incomes. It is estimated that 850,000 people are missing out on it.

If you have a severe disability you could also get an extra £67.30 a week

If you care for another adult you could also get an extra £37.70 a week.

When assessing a claim for pension credit, the following benefits are not counted as income –

- Attendance allowance
- Christmas bonus
- Child benefit
- Disability living allowance
- Personal independence payment
- Winter fuel allowance
- Housing benefit
- Council tax reduction

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 (£182.60 from 1 April 2022) for single people and £270.30 (£278.70 from 1 April 2022) for a couple.

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.

By claiming Pension Credit you may also qualify for other payments and benefits such as free NHS prescriptions, council tax support, free eye tests, help with heating costs, 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.

“

If you are of state pension age you may be able to claim an extra £60 a week.

”



## Attendance Allowance

Are you of state pension age and have a disability or illness that has made it hard for you to look after yourself for more than 6 months?

Attendance Allowance is tax free and isn't means tested so it doesn't matter what other money you get or have in savings. You can claim it even if you are still working and earning money. You don't have to have someone looking after you in order to claim.

The amount you could get –

- £60 a week if you need help during the day OR night
- £89.60 if you need help during the day AND night, or you are terminally ill

You may then qualify for other benefits such as Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction.

You can't claim Attendance Allowance if you already get Personal Independent Payment or Disability Living Allowance.

Call the Attendance Allowance helpline on 0800 731 0122 or apply online [www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/how-to-claim](https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/how-to-claim)

The claim form is long and it's important that you stress how your disability or illness affects you. You may want to get help to complete it from your local Citizen's Advice, benefits advisors at your local council or any other advice agency.

## Help to Save

Help to Save is a government backed savings scheme for those receiving Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit. A bonus of 50p is paid for every £1 saved over 4 years.

You can save between £1 and £50 each month but you don't have to pay money in every month. Money can be paid in by debit card, standing order or bank transfer.

“

A bonus of 50p is paid for every £1 saved over 4 years.

”

Bonuses are paid at the end of two and four years. These are based on how much you have saved.

You can close the account at any time but you may miss out on bonuses and you can't open another one.

The account closes after 4 years and you can't open another Help to Save account.

See: [www.gov.uk/get-help-savings-low-income](https://www.gov.uk/get-help-savings-low-income) for more details.

## 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](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk)

“

This newsletter is sent in recyclable plastic packaging made from biodegradable potato starch.

”

## Lettable standard

Recent winners of £25 in the quarterly lettable standard survey draws -

**Charles Santon**, Yellowley Court, Darlington

**Maria Robinson**, North Eastern Court, Gateshead

**Margaret Oakley**, Great Western Court, Hereford

**Patricia Knight**, The Laurels, Bishop Auckland

**John Jones**, The Laurels, Bishop Auckland

## Find out what benefits

You can find out what benefits you may be able to get by doing a benefits check online at either of the following websites

[www.entitledto.co.uk](https://www.entitledto.co.uk)

[www.benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk](https://www.benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk)

It will take about 20 minutes to complete the check

# How do we deal with fire safety?

**We take all reasonable steps to prevent and control the risk of fire in your home and comply with current laws and regulation.**

As a minimum we have to provide a working smoke alarm on each floor of your home; and a carbon monoxide detector if you have gas or oil heating.

We fit hardwired smoke alarms in new build homes and our sheltered schemes. These are checked and maintained by us.

“As a minimum we have to provide a working smoke alarm on each floor of your home”

Battery operated smoke alarms are fitted in the rest of our homes and residents are responsible for testing these regularly. Before October 2022, residents were also responsible for replacing these as necessary. We only checked and replaced the battery operated fire alarms before reletting a home. But the law has changed and we will now replace faulty battery smoke alarms whenever these are reported to us.

All our homes with gas or oil heating have carbon monoxide detectors. These are checked annually during the gas/oil service visit and when a home is re-let, and we replace faulty alarms whenever needed.

A qualified and certified fire risk specialist does a fire risk assessment annually for the communal areas of sheltered housing schemes; and every two years for other blocks of flats that have communal entrances/hallways/staircases.

The fire risk assessor looks for any potential dangers, checks that we have provided adequate fire precautions such as fire alarms and fire doors, and makes recommendations for reducing any dangers or risks.

You can ask to see a copy of the fire risk assessment for the building that you live in.

“All our homes with gas or oil heating have carbon monoxide detectors.”



**New fire safety law means that we must give information about fire safety annually to residents of all building with a communal entrance, and display it in a communal area. This information must include:**

- The importance of fire doors in the event of a fire
- That fire doors and self-closing devices should not be tampered with
- That any faults or damage to fire doors should be reported immediately
- The fire safety instructions on the evacuation or stay put strategy for the building
- How to report a fire.

**Other measures that we have in place to prevent or reduce the risk of fire are:**

- Fire doors designed to prevent the spread of fire for at least 30 minutes are fitted to all homes that open onto an internal communal area
- Annual gas safety checks and servicing
- Checking the electrics in each home every five years and giving a copy of the report to residents
- Testing of any portable electrical appliances in communal areas every two years by an electrical contractor, and a visual check by a member of staff every other year

A full copy of our fire safety policy is available on our website and on request.

- Regular checks and servicing of fire detectors, fire alarms, emergency lighting systems, fire extinguishers and any other fire equipment in communal areas
- Practice fire drills every six months at sheltered schemes
- Fire retardant upholstered furnishings in communal areas
- Fire safety advice publicised to residents via the residents' handbook and newsletters
- No smoking policy in communal areas
- Fire safety signs in communal areas
- Evacuation plan for each sheltered scheme – depending on the structural fire safety of the building and the view of the local fire authority this may state that residents should remain in their home rather than evacuate the building
- Provide information at sheltered schemes including a drawing of the building and a list of homes with oxygen cylinders, for use by fire fighters if there is a fire
- Regular checks that residents' belongings aren't stored in communal areas
- Mobility scooter stores provided at sheltered schemes, wherever possible
- Specialist smoke alarms provided for disabled residents.



## Damp & Mould

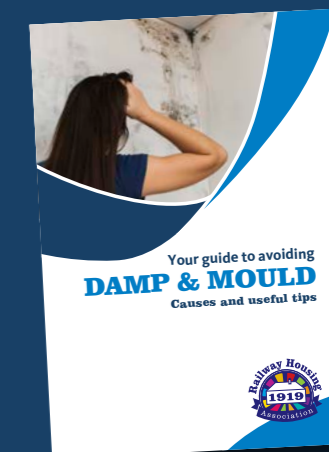
Do you have damp and mould in your home? Please report it to us as soon as possible by:

- Calling freephone: **0800 0287428**
- Using the 'Report a Repair' form or the **Residents' Portal** on this website
- Emailing: **info@railwayha.co.uk**

We are here to help and will take every report seriously.

In some cases, it can take time to find out what is causing the problem and to fix it, but we will try our best to keep you informed of progress.

There is more information on our website and a full copy of our policy that sets out how we deal with damp and mould is available on request.



## Join us

We recently discussed fire safety and damp and mould with residents who are members of the Focus Group. If you would like to help decide the association's plans and improve our services by becoming a member of our Board, Scrutiny Panel, Focus Group and/or Resident Forum, please call Sahar Omar on Freephone: **0800 028 7428** or email: **info@railwayha.co.uk** or contact us via social media.

## Residents' Scrutiny Panel Planned Maintenance

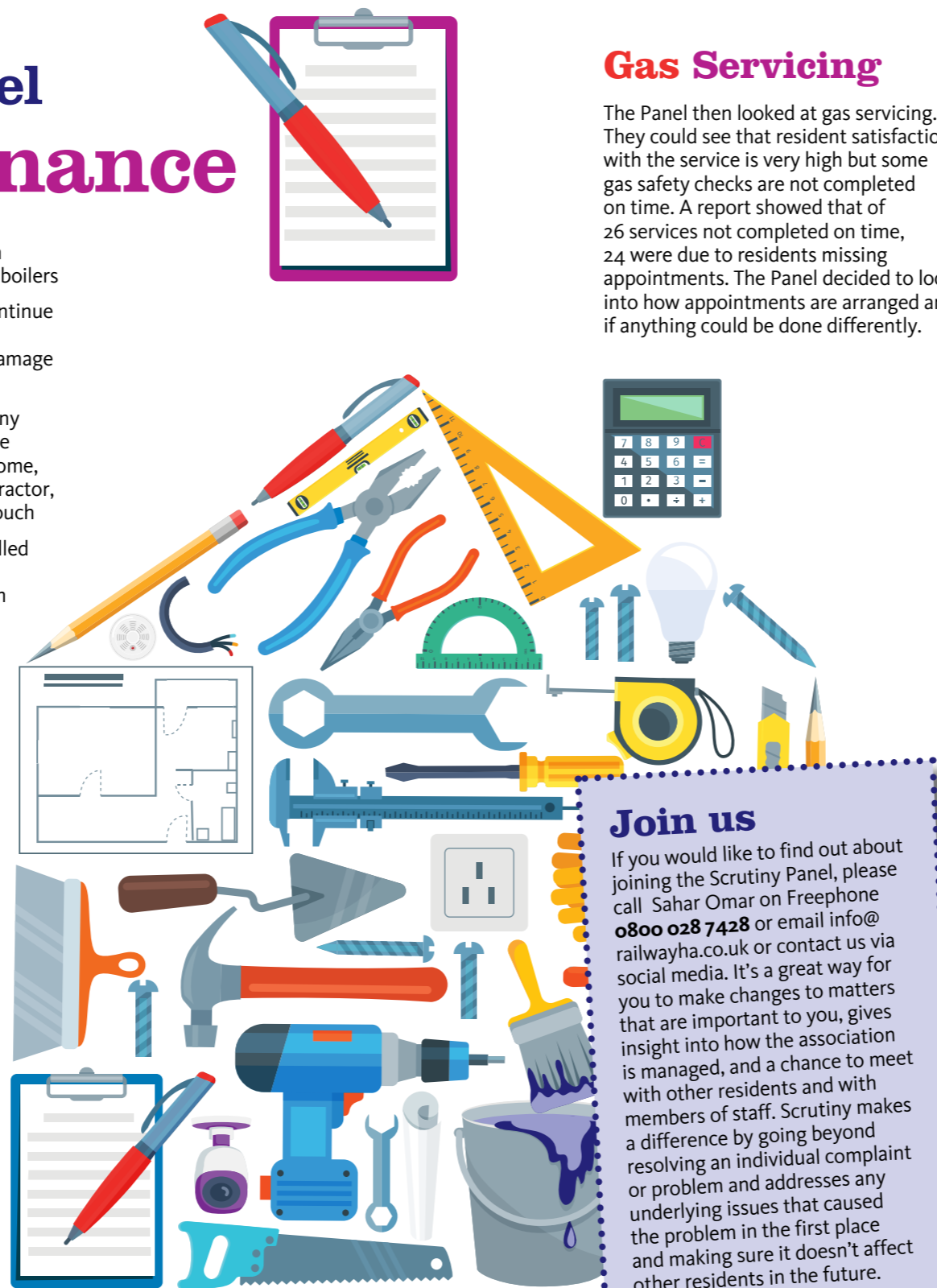
In the last edition of RHA News, it was reported that six residents who are members of the Scrutiny Panel had looked in detail at how we plan and carry out major improvement works such as replacing kitchens, bathrooms and window frames.

The Association is now making the following changes recommended by the Panel to improve this service –

- As much notice as possible will be given to residents of the start date for planned works
- Information given to residents before planned works start will include –
  - a simple step by step list of everything that will be done
  - a contact telephone number for the contractor
  - whether access to the home will be affected
  - whether the contractor will make good any damage to decoration
  - how long the work will take
  - an idea of how much dust and noise there will be
  - details of any choices of kitchen units, floor covering, worktops etc
  - proposed layout
  - lighting
  - number and position of sockets
  - whether a disturbance allowance will be paid and if so, whether it will be paid at the end of the work in an individual home or at the end of the contract.

- Contractors will provide a plain English one page guide to new boilers
- Disturbance allowances will continue to be paid for certain works, in addition to making good any damage to decoration
- Residents will be informed of any planned or cyclical maintenance due to be carried out in their home, including the name of the contractor, before the contractor gets in touch
- Heated towel rails will be installed during bathroom renewals, in bathrooms with sufficient room for a towel rail and a radiator

“ Residents will be informed of any planned or cyclical maintenance due to be carried out in their home ”



### Gas Servicing

The Panel then looked at gas servicing. They could see that resident satisfaction with the service is very high but some gas safety checks are not completed on time. A report showed that of 26 services not completed on time, 24 were due to residents missing appointments. The Panel decided to look into how appointments are arranged and if anything could be done differently.

The Panel agreed that the letters sent to residents to arrange appointments for gas servicing are easy to understand. They also commented how easy it is to contact the gas engineer to rearrange appointments if the appointment given is inconvenient

However, they made some recommendations for other changes that are now being made by the association –

- Stop sending a letter three months before the service is due because it is too far in advance and doesn't give an actual appointment
- Include the contact details for the gas engineer in the appointment letter, and highlight the request to follow instructions on a calling card, to emphasise the importance of rearranging the appointment if they miss it

- If a resident misses an appointment and doesn't get in touch to rearrange it, include information in the next letter on the risk of not having your boiler checked
- Allow more time to try to gain access to carry out the gas safety checks
- Visit and make enquiries about residents before legal action is taken, to try and find out if there are any extenuating circumstances/reasons for missed appointments
- Consider increasing the charge made for missed appointments from £20 to £50-100.

### Join us

If you would like to find out about joining the Scrutiny Panel, please call Sahar Omar on Freephone 0800 028 7428 or email info@railwayha.co.uk or contact us via social media. It's a great way for you to make changes to matters that are important to you, gives insight into how the association is managed, and a chance to meet with other residents and with members of staff. Scrutiny makes a difference by going beyond resolving an individual complaint or problem and addresses any underlying issues that caused the problem in the first place and making sure it doesn't affect other residents in the future.

### Want to win a £30 shopping voucher?

If you keep the first appointment made for our gas engineer to service your gas heating, you will be automatically entered into a prize draw.

The Quarterly Gas Servicing Prize Draw was won by Anthony Thorns of West Auckland Road in Darlington.



# Happy Birthday Geraldine

We were recently delighted to be part of the 90th birthday celebrations for Geraldine Bell, who lives in our Patrick Stirling Court sheltered housing scheme in Doncaster.

Geraldine was joined by her family including grand-daughter Laura, and friends for an afternoon tea party in the communal lounge.

Born in 1933, Geraldine grew up near Salisbury during the war but moved (quite literally) to the other side of the UK when her father started a job in Wick, Scotland.

While she was training as a nurse in Edinburgh, on her way back after some leave she met her husband Bill on a train (he was on his way back to Edinburgh where he was training as an Industrial Chemist), and they married in Gateshead in 1961 and went on to have three children, Sarah, Alison and Thomas while in Barbados where they worked at the time.

Geraldine trained as a nurse and spent most of her working life in the profession, particularly working within orthopedics. She also worked as a school nurse when the family lived in Penrith. She finished her working life at Tickhill Hospital, Doncaster.

Geraldine moved to Patrick Stirling Court in 2018 because she was finding her home in Doncaster difficult to manage, and her daughter Sarah says she has thrived since moving to the scheme.

She likes to take part in activities at Patrick Stirling Court and regularly attends the local Methodist church, where she has made many friends.



Below: Geraldine with children Thomas and Sarah.

## Win £25

Please cut out this page and return to us by Freepost to be in with a chance of winning £25. FREEPOST PLUS, RUCX-XATU-UKSC, Railway Housing Association, Maple House, 11 Tillage Green, Westpark Village, Darlington DL2 2GL.

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Audrey Willey, from York, winner of the word search puzzle in the last edition of RHA News, who receives £25.



## Word Search

# Healthy Food

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

MILK  
YOGURT  
APPLE  
BANANA  
BROCOLLI  
CHERRY  
CHEESE  
BREAD  
APRICOTS

AVOCADO  
CANTALOUPE  
RASPBERRY  
TOMATO  
CRANBERRY  
LEMON  
LIME  
FIG  
ONION

ARTICHOLES  
GINGER  
SPINACH  
SQUASH  
GARLIC  
PEANUTS  
SHELLFISH  
SALMON  
CRAB

## Our performance

Our performance as at 31 December 2022

### Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 2.00% (target is 2.00%)



### Lettings

Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 37.3% (target 70%)

*Our contractors are still having problems getting materials and labour to do essential repairs needed before homes are re-let*



### Response to Letters

Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 88% (target is 98%)



### Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%)



### Repairs and Maintenance

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



Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 90% (target is 89%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 64% (target is 85%)



### Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 0.18% (target is 5%).



*\*This is cumulative and there may be more savings made by the end of March 2023*

## New measures of resident satisfaction

From 1st April 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing requires all housing associations to monitor and report on a range of satisfaction measures. These include some that we already report to you in this newsletter and our annual report (calendar) but there are also some new ones. We will publish all of the results annually but we will also discuss and agree with residents who are members of our focus group what will be included in future newsletters.



### Has your telephone number changed?

Is your email address up to date? To update your details please email [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) or call 0800 028 7428.