

the grapevine...

Welcome to the summer 2011 edition of Grapevine - our newsletter for tenants. We hope you find grapevine both interesting and useful. We want to tailor future editions around information you want including - for this reason we have included a feedback slip. Please take the time to complete and return it. By doing this you will not only help us to focus on issues that are important to you but also help with the future development of services provided by the Council.

John Beeneey and Steven Jennings

Tenant Editorial Panel

New Contractor on the Horizon

August should see the appointment of a new contractor to undertake work on the council's five year Home Improvement Programme.

Over the last few months members of the Maintenance and Improvement team and the Chair of the Tenant Panel, Gina Kirby, have been working to find the new contractor.

Six contractors applied and they were visited on 'live' sites by Gina, Hugo Westhoff, Head of Maintenance and Improvement and Graham Hutchinson, Partnership and Planning Manager to see them

in action. They also chatted with tenants and tenant representatives.

Following those site meetings the contractors were each invited to give a presentation to the selection panel in June, after which each was assessed and given a score to find the winning contractor.

Legal requirements means there is a 'cooling off' period and subject to no challenges being made by the contractors who were not offered the appointment, the council will be able to tie up the legal and contractual issues by August.

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The cost of printing this newsletter is 28p

Once that is done work on the improvement programme will begin and tenants due to have work undertaken will be contacted.

For more information contact Graham Hutchinson on 01748 828718.

If you want a copy of the five year Home Improvement plan you can view and download a copy from richmondshire.gov.uk/council/housing/housing_improvements.

If you don't have access to the internet you can ask for a paper copy by contacting a member of the Housing Management Team on 01748 829100.

Oh poo...

...the subject that gets everyone talking is animal excrement on public footpaths. It's not nice and it should not happen.

Street Scene colleagues have answered some of the questions you posed in our winter edition of Grapevine:

What can you do if you see a horse fouling in public?

There are no laws against horses fouling in public and there is no legal requirement for riders to clean it up.

Can you catch any diseases from horse dung?

Horse dung does not carry any disease - unlike dog faeces which contains *Toxocara Canis* which can cause blindness in humans

What about other animals - like cats or ducks - that foul in public. Can anything be done about this?

Fouling by animals other than dogs does not constitute an offence

What can the council do if someone is reported letting their dog foul in a public place and not disposing of it properly?

The council can prosecute or fine the responsible person - an adult or child aged 16 years or over.

The Street Scene team has produced a series of posters which are up across the district to encourage people to act in a responsible manner and dispose of dog faeces. They are asked to use a bag which should be tied and deposited in a waste bin - or taken home for disposal.



Spot the Difference winner



Mrs Brown of 1 Snowdrop Walk, Colburn won the winter Grapevine Spot the Difference competition and received £20 in Argos vouchers. The differences were:

- Ornament on top of window
- Necklace on lady
- Bar on window
- Light switch on wall beside lady
- Curtain length
- Washing machine door
- Moustache on burglar face
- Aerial on TV
- Wall plaque above lady
- Hand of man sitting

Make sense of your finances

...ever felt that you weren't completely in control of your finances?

...do you want to make better decisions about your money?

If either of these apply to you, then Richmondshire Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to help. They provide one-to-one help or sessions for groups where they can look at any money issues.

And their services are not just for people who find themselves in difficulty. They are designed to help people avoid financial difficulties.

For anyone finding themselves in debt, the sessions will be invaluable in helping to

understand how to begin to take control of your money.

One-to-one sessions are designed to help individuals understand their current financial circumstances and develop their own knowledge, skills and confidence to make the right decisions. These sessions would normally be in the bureau in Richmond.

Group sessions are tailored to the needs of the group and usually focus on the broader issues of financial

management. For example, a session with expectant mothers might cover topics such as coping on a low income with increased outgoings and how to claim appropriate benefits. The CAB can bring these sessions to where the group regularly meets.

Ring the Bureau on 01748 823862.

This MoneyActive project is supported by the Nationwide Building Society.

On the Buses... ...your bus pass questions answered

- Although the scheme became the responsibility of North Yorkshire County Council on April 1, 2011 there is an agreement in place for Richmondshire District Council and all the other districts in North Yorkshire to deal with enquiries up until 31 March 2012. Until that time customers can still apply, make amendments and raise queries at any of the district council's community offices. Applications can also still be made at Catterick Library.
- The times at which you can

use your bus pass across Richmondshire remain the same - between 9am and 6am weekdays and anytime at weekend and on bank holidays.

- Bus pass holders do not need to get a new pass and can continue to use the pass they have until it is due to expire - at this point a new pass will be issued by North Yorkshire County Council.
- From April 1, 2012 North Yorkshire County Council will have put in place

arrangements to allow customers to get their passes from certain locations or using the website.

For more information contact North Yorkshire County Council: customer.services@northyorks.gov.uk or 0845 872734 or visit the website at: www.northyorks.gov.uk



How satisfied are you...

As you will know from previous Grapevines, we are continually asking for feedback on specific services you receive. It tells us how you rate the service you received, and shows us where we need to make improvements. The following table shows how many of you have told us the service you received between April 1, 2010 and March 31, 2011 had been either good or very good. More information is available on richmondshire.gov.uk under council housing.

	New Tenancies	Housing Register	Adaptations	Repair Service
Standard of Advice given	84%	76%	86%	67%
Helpfulness of staff	97%	78%	92%	79%
Standard of Home				77%
Time taken to complete repair			39%	60%
Quality of workmanship				63%

As well as monitoring satisfaction levels we also monitor how we are performing as a landlord in specific areas. Some of these areas include how long it takes to re-let a property after it is empty and how much of the rent due is collected. The following table shows you how we have been performing during 2010/11.

Measure	Target by 31/3/11	Performance at 31/03/11	Comments
Re-let: time taken to complete repairs	Minor repairs - 5 days Major repairs - 10 days	Minor repairs - 7 days Major repairs - 15 days	Target slipped due to severe winter period
Re-let empty properties	20 days	32 days	Target slipped due to severe winter period and refusals of accommodation
Offer appointments for non urgent internal repairs	75%	81%	
Complete priority repairs (category 1 and 2) within one day	80%	89%	
Collect council tenant rent due	New target	97%	

We asked... You said... We did...

In the Winter 2010 edition of Grapevine we asked for your views - this is what you told us

Did you find the information in the Grapevine interesting and useful?

Yes	No	Tenant comments	What we did as a result
93%	7%	7% of you told us: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Print too small to read ■ Waste of money ■ Information is available via the media ■ Not a lot of useful Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will continue to include information you have told us is of interest to you ■ We will tell you how much each copy costs ■ We will ask that you contact us if you want a copy in larger print



What information would you like to have in future editions?

Tenant comments	What we did as a result
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give details of specific areas and when improvement are due to be done ■ Cost of producing the Grapevine ■ Action on dog and horse fouling ■ More interesting news stories ■ Changes to bus pass scheme ■ Double glazing - when will schemes be done on Cutpurse ■ How many people are on the Tenants Panel ■ Information on work presently being carried out ■ Home insurance and the Improvement Programme ■ Crime and how we tackle it ■ New council property ■ Advice for tenants having financial problems ■ Letters page with views from the residents ■ Places where the older generation can meet and socialise ■ How we deal with vandalism ■ New builds - will Hawes be getting any Older Persons bungalow ■ Scrap it to keep front line services going ■ Point system for well kept gardens, pride in area and litter free schemes ■ Help schemes ■ Type of improvements that Tenants can do themselves ■ Parking and speeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is not possible to cover all the issues raised as the newsletter would become too large. The editorial panel selected a number of topics for the summer 2011 edition - and will continue to do so for future editions

Do you think the cost of printing this newsletter is value for money?

Yes	No	What we did as a result
90%	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will limited the number of pages in order that we can continue to produce a newsletter which is value for money for tenants

Would you like to see the installation of hardstanding/driveways included within the Improvement Programme?

Yes	No	What we did as a result
82%	18%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We have included the provision of hard standings within our 5 year improvement programme and will provide this additional improvement from 11/12 as one of our local offers to assist in reducing parking difficulties on council estates

Would you be interested in attending an evening meeting with representatives from Royal Sun Alliance to learn more about the Tenants Insurance Scheme?

Yes	No	Tenant comments	What we did as a result
14%	86%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Waste of time ■ What's the point ■ Already a member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will ask tenants who said they would like to attend a meeting to provide their name/address and contact telephone number so that we can try and arrange this

A lot has been happening in the world of Tenant Involvement...

Over the past few months the Tenant Panel and Monitoring group have been involved in many issues including:

- site visits and interviews for prospective Maintenance and Improvement Contractors
- performance meetings with the Council's Gas Contractor, Help Link
- District Council Scrutiny and Strategy meetings
- Anti-social behaviour training in Manchester
- job shadowing the Maintenance Manager
- Tenant Panel members considered reports and gave their views on: communal cleaning, automated text messaging for rent cases, information packs for tenants and performance figures from customer feedback on individual housing services
- a member of the Tenant Panel Group was involved in the development of the new council housing website and did a 'test drive' of the site which resulted in some changes being made before it went live
- Members of the Monitoring Group developed a service standard for sheltered

housing which is to be circulated to our Sounding Board and independent sheltered tenants for their views prior to 'going live'

- Members of the Tenant Panel, Monitoring Group and Sounding Board gave their views on a new standard for empty properties, which went live on July 1 - the Void Lettable Standard
- Members of the Tenant Panel agreed the budget to be allocated for 11/12 to be used for members of the various tenant groups and identified some training they wanted

One of the questions asked in the winter edition was for more information on how many tenants we had in our groups.

We currently have:

- 12 Tenant Panel Members
- 10 Monitoring and Involvement Members
- 33 Sounding Board members
- 2 Editorial Panel members.

If you are interesting in joining any of the above groups and would like some more information call Susie Eales on 01748 827191.

Life as a Tenant Panel member... ...one member tells all

Why did you join?

I wanted to help establish better relations between the council and tenants

What have you done since joining?

I have helped put tenants views forwards at meetings

Have your views been taken account of by the council?

Yes

Do you think your views made a difference to the action taken by the council?

Yes - my views were given when we were asked about draft policies which were amended to take account of mine and other members' views

Do you know more about what happens in the council and why since joining the Tenant Panel

Most definitely

Have you been given the opportunity to undertake training to learn more about specific issues

Yes - I went on a two day course looking at issues and solutions around anti-social behaviour

Did you enjoy the training and will you be using it in the future

Yes

Are you glad you become a member and would you suggest others get involved?

Definitely - I would suggest other tenants get involved.

Walking the Estates

Estate walkabouts are reaping huge rewards with tenants, agencies and landlords undertaking work to tidy up the district.

Over the last six months Estate Managers, the Tenancy Relations Manager, local Councillors and members of the Tenant Panel have been walking the estates across the district.

Almost 1400 visits to properties in both rural areas and the towns of Richmond and Colburn have been made.

They identify issues needing attention - and the action to be taken. That has included: rubbish in gardens, abandoned vehicles, overgrown gardens, broken fencing and meter cupboard boxes, dog faeces, rubbish in stairways and free papers being delivered inappropriately.

All the issues are logged with follow up action then taken by the officers. That could bring in other agencies and landlords - including housing associations.

The following table shows the number of visits made and those where a follow up visit was needed. The majority of those tenants who were contacted did attend to the work as requested by the housing team.

Area	Visits undertaken	Revisits to address issues	Improvement following revisit	Further follow ups after revisit
Rural areas (A66/Brompton/ Swaledale/Wensleydale/Leyburn)	703	33 (5%)	27 (81%)	6 (18%)
Colburn	324	64 (20%)	49 (77%)	15 (23%)
Richmond	358	116 (32%)	75 (64%)	41 (36%)

Plans for walkabouts for the next six months are currently being made - Colburn and Richmond were visited in August. Posters will go up in the community offices and on Richmondshire.gov.uk giving exact dates. Anyone wanting to join any of the walkabouts is welcome - simply meet up as directed on the posters

News about your drains

The law on sewer ownership is changing. You are likely to have had something in the post from the water authority informing you of changes which are coming into force from October 1.

What does this mean for you as tenants?

Well previously work which was required as a result of blocked drains was taken care of by the council in most cases. However this

will now change from October 1 with the responsibility becoming that of the local water authority.

What should you do if you have a problem with your drains from 1 October 2011?

In the first instance you should still contact the council on 01748 829100. The Council will identify the problem and who is responsible for carrying out the work. If you need to contact the local water authority the council will tell you.

What about the time it takes to fix the problem?

In the past drainage problems were prioritized within the councils repair priorities. From the 1 October the council's priority to do drainage work will be replaced with a new priority to ensure inspections are undertaken within the same time frame following your initial report of a problem. The water authority will determine the time frame for completing the repair and advise you of this.

Local Offers 2011/12

As a result of customer feedback

The first local offers to tenants have been developed as a direct result of customer feedback. They will be monitored by the Community Management Team as well as the Tenant Panel as part of their performance monitoring work across the housing service. The 'local offers' will form part of the appropriate Standards and we are currently working to amend the existing standards to take account of these 'local offers'. Details of the 'local offers' are listed below, with links to the relevant National Standard being shown.

Local Offer	National Standard	Monitoring Arrangements
Tenant Involvement: We will provide £2,000 as requested by the Tenant Panel to provide training, skills and capacity building to members of the various involvement groups	Tenant Involvement and Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tenant Panel monitoring of budget spend
Repairs and Maintenance: We will install extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens in all void properties as an 'offer to new tenants'	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Customer satisfaction survey monitored as part of the Community Management Team performance meeting ■ Tenant Panel performance monitoring
Home Improvements: We will incorporate the provision of hard standings throughout our five year plan	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of hard standings completed in each year - monitored as part of major works monitoring ■ Tenant Panel performance monitoring
Estate Management and Anti-social behaviour: We will undertake Estate Walkabouts across the district with tenants, tenant representatives and ward Councillors	Neighbourhood and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Estate Walkabouts undertaken with feedback on actions taken in grapevine and web site ■ Tenant Panel performance monitoring

Customer Feedback - your views really do matter!

- Did you find the information in Grapevine interesting and useful? Yes No
If no why not?
- What information would you like to have in future editions?
- Having read the articles about tenant involvement would you like to get more involved? Yes No
If yes please provide your details below.
- If you previously said you would be interested in attending an evening meeting with a representative from Royal Sun Alliance to learn more about the Tenants Insurance Scheme, please provide your details below.
- Would you like a copy of the grapevine in large print? Yes No
If yes please provide your details below.
- Do you have a coal fire or any type of solid fuel heating in your home? Yes No
If yes please provide your details below as we want to be able to service these for you.
- Please provide you name, address and contact telephone number if you have been asked to in any of the above questions:

Thank you for the time taken to complete this feedback - return it to us in the prepaid envelope