

grapevine...

Welcome to the Spring edition of our tenants newsletter, Grapevine. It's good to hear from your feedback that you are finding the newsletter both interesting and useful - 98% of our readers have told us this. We want to continue to provide you with information that meets your needs so it is very important that you tell us what is important to you. Please complete and return the feedback slip included in this newsletter.

John Beeneey and Steven Jennings

Tenant Editorial Panel

Inside this issue:

- > What's New
- > How satisfied are you?
- > We asked... You said... We did...
- > Improvements, Improvements, Improvements
- > Estate Walkabouts
- > Big Changes for Council Housing Finance
- > New advice service for Richmondshire residents
- > Appointments with Housing Officers
- > Right to Buy
- > Customer feedback

The cost of printing this newsletter is 28p

Annual Garden Competition...



Last summer saw our first annual garden competition.

There was no formal entry form, a team of judges simply inspected all the gardens in Richmondshire owned by council tenants. They checked them out during August and early September applying set criteria to their judging scores. The results showed that many tenants take a lot of pride in their gardens - there was some really high marking by the judges.

The competition takes place every year with the judges out and about once more from July. So if you didn't win a prize in 2011 now is the time to start planning. All our winners are wished a really big 'Well Done' - please keep up the good work.



2011 winners:

■ Central

- 1st Mr and Mrs Templeton
- Joint 2nd Mr R Elliott - Brompton on Swale
Mr and Mrs S Ward - Sleegill

■ Garrison

- 1st Mr D Brown - Hipswell
- 2nd Mr and Mrs E Walsh - Colburn
- Joint 3rd Mr and Mrs F Hill - Colburn
Mr S Beattie - Colburn

■ Lower Wensleydale

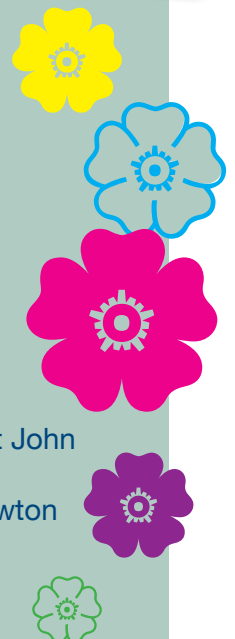
- Joint 1st Mr and Mrs J McGregor - Redmire
Mr and Mrs A Worboys - Harmby
- 3rd Mrs E Brown - Harmby

■ North Richmondshire

- 1st Mr and Mrs J Dixon - Aldborough St John
- 2nd Mr R Carter - Croft on Tees
- 3rd Mr and Mrs B Swanston - North Cowton

■ Upper Dales

- 1st Mr and Mrs G Frankland - Reeth
- 2nd Mr and Mrs D Bastow - Reeth
- 3rd Mrs M Whitehead - Reeth



What's New...

An exciting new scheme to help all council tenants with decorating costs is about to be launched.

The Paint Packs initiative goes live on April 1.

Over the last few months we have been looking at how we fund decorating costs following major improvement schemes - and help tenants moving into a new home.

Under the current scheme the council makes cheque payments calculated on the number of rooms affected by the work done. Whilst in practice this gives tenants a contribution towards the decorating work, it does not ensure the money was being spent in the way it was intended or provide value for money.

So after research with other housing organisations and in the market place we asked the Tenants Panel and our Councillor Housing spokesperson to look at 'Paint Packs' operated by Dulux.

Not only does this scheme provide good value it removes the need for tenants to travel as everything can be ordered from the comfort of your home and delivered within 24 hours free of charge.

Anyone affected by major improvement work or moving into a new home will be given a voucher and a colour choice card by the Housing Management Team allowing them to purchase a pack to decorate the rooms affected.

And for the first time all tenants can benefit - anyone simply wanting to spruce up their home can take advantage of a discount of around 25%.

Using the scheme is simple - check out what's available on duluxdecoratorcentre.co.uk and then order by calling 0845 850 2200. There is free technical advice and free tester pots, delivery is free and payment is only made on delivery! You will need to provide proof that you are the tenant (rent card/tenancy agreement).

If you want to shop in person you can buy materials from any of the Dulux decorator centres - Darlington is the nearest.

"We know it matters to you how we spend the budgets we have and we want to make sure we do it in a way that shows value for money and provides something for as many tenants as possible," said Councillor Peter Wood.

"Moving to Paint Packs does just that. We will be able to help tenants who have had work done and those that are just moving into their new homes but at the same time help all tenants afford quality materials at more affordable prices, ever more important with continuing pressures on household income."

Great discounts

As a valued customer of **Dulux Decorator Centres' redecoration scheme**, we are pleased to offer you:

- Huge savings averaging **25% off*** across the range
- **FREE** next day delivery
- A choice of over **14,000 colours**
- Telephone or **24/7 online ordering**
- **FREE** technical advice from our friendly team
- **FREE** tester pots throughout the year

For your nearest store call **0845 850 2200**
Or visit online at www.duluxdecoratorcentre.co.uk

Dulux
Decorators
Behind Britain's **GREAT** decorators

How satisfied are you?...

Thank you for continuing to send us your comments through our 'quick ticks' survey. They provide us with information on how you rate the service you have received, and lets us see where we need to make improvements.

The table below shows how many of you have told us the service you received between 1 April - 30 September 2011 had been either good or very good. More information is available at [richmondshire.gov.uk /councilhousing](http://richmondshire.gov.uk/councilhousing).

	New Tenancies	Housing Register	Adaptations	Repair Service
Standard of Advice given	100%	69%	71%	68%
Helpfulness of staff	100%	79%	84%	85%
Standard of home	76%			
Time taken to complete repair				49%
Quality of workmanship				86%

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 2011/12.

	Target by 31/3/12	Performance at 30/09/11	Comments
Relet - time taken to complete repairs	Minor repairs - 5 days Major repairs - 10 days	Minor repairs - 6 days Major repairs - 15 days	Target slipped due to high level of empty properties taking priority
Relet empty properties	20 days	26 days	Target slipped due to high level of empty properties
Offer appointments for non urgent internal repairs	75%	83%	We will continue to try and maintain this level of performance
Complete priority repairs (category 1 and 2) within 1 day	80%	90%	We will continue to try and maintain this level of performance
Collect council tenant rent due	97.32%	95.5%	We will target resources to increase the amount of rent collected

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

	Yes	No	Tenant comments	What we did
Did you find the information in Grapevine interesting and useful?	96%	4%	Very little real information just the council patting themselves on the back and telling us what they are not responsible for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ we will continue to provide performance information so you, as tenants, can see how we are performing as a landlord. This is something which is considered to be best practice ■ we provide information in response to feedback and if we are not the responsible agency for dealing with a particular issue we will try to help by providing you with details of who is responsible.
What information would you like to have in future editions?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ any information ■ news about home improvements and dates to be carried out ■ specific information on future home improvements/timescales ■ amount of people on Tenants Panel and their names ■ walking the estate ■ more on crime and improvements on crime ■ home appointments with housing officer ■ old style information and proper advice ■ the current policy on right to purchase bungalows ■ plainer print - white on pale is not emphatic enough ■ more about people keeping gardens tidy as it is not fair for the people who do ■ keeping tenants informed of what is going on now and in the future ■ when will double glazing begin in Colburn ■ more regarding events in the Richmondshire area ■ when will the windows at Norman Road be changed to double glazed ■ what action will be taken against proven ASB residents ■ further information on a venue for senior citizens to socialise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ we will continue to include information which is important to you, together with changes which are coming about through Central Government policy.



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ what is happening generally around the area ■ more competitions. 	
Having read the articles about tenant involvement would you like to get more involved?	65 tenants	20 tenants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ we have contacted a number of tenants who told us they were interested in getting involved and who provided us with their addresses. However some of you forgot to add your address to the feedback form. Please contact Susie Eales on 01748 827191 to discuss what you would like to do and to provide you with the dates of our next meetings.
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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ we received no details from tenants regarding this meeting and as a result it did not go ahead ■ if you want more details about the Tenants Simple Insurance Scheme contact the council's Community Offices or Royal Sun Alliance on 0845 671 8172.
Would you like a copy of the grapevine in large print?	3 tenants	82 tenants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ of the three tenants who requested this service, only one provided an address ■ we will arrange for copies of grapevine to be sent in large print to the tenants who provide their address ■ if you would like a copy in large print please contact the Housing Management team on 01748 829100.
Do you have a coal fire or any type of solid fuel heating in your home?	69 tenants	25 tenants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ we have updated our records and will be arranging visits to all those tenants with this type of heating.



Improvements... Improvements... Improvements...

Many of you are asking when improvements are coming to your estates.

It is difficult to reply to every query through this newsletter, but our five year plan is currently being updated and that information will also be

relayed to the website and the community offices.

And as requested we will be producing a one page flyer with all the information you need which we can send out to you.

This year, since going live with our contract partnership with

Kier, we have modernised kitchens and bathrooms and upgraded electrical wiring in properties in Brompton on Swale and Richmond.

Next year we hope to replace windows in Scorton, Finghall, Moulton, Hawes, Spennythorne, Catterick, and Hipswell.

Estate Walkabouts



The third programme of estate walkabouts has kicked off.

Launched 12 months ago they allow us to assess which locations need more attention than others. Rural parishes will now receive one visit each year and the towns of Colburn and Richmond three.

These walkabouts are making a difference and the amount of revisits we are making to address issues following the walkabout has reduced. In the first wave we had 64 revisits to Colburn - that has now fallen

to 59. In Richmond it is even better - we started with 116 revisits and now have only 50. We hope this will continue as more tenants start to take pride in their estate and keep their gardens and communal areas clean and tidy.

The table below 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 requested by the housing team.

Area	Visits undertaken	Revisits to address issues
Colburn	324	59 (18%)
Richmond	358	50 (14%)

For details and information on the next walkabouts pop into one of the council's community offices or check out richmondshire.gov.uk under council housing.

Big Changes for Council Housing Finance...

The biggest ever shake up of Council housing finance kicks in on April 1.

Currently it is funded through a national subsidy where the Government takes rent off some Councils and gives it to others - defined by a complicated calculation. This system is very difficult to understand and the majority of Councils feel it is unfair. Richmondshire, for example, gets about £1.8m taken from its housing account each year - so is a big loser in the system.

The Government has decided to scrap the current system and from April 1 Richmondshire will 'buy' itself out of the

scheme - at a cost of just over £22m. And the only way the Council can afford this is to borrow the money needed.

Councillor Peter Wood, Housing Spokesperson for the Council explains:

"Even though we need to borrow this massive amount of money to buy ourselves out of the subsidy system we will still be better off in the long run. This is because although we will need to repay the debt we won't have money taken from us each year via the subsidy system."

"Our financial projections show that the housing account will be much better off under the new system - the key question hopefully in the future will be - how are we going to spend this extra money?"

And Colin Dales, Assistant Director, added: *"We have no choice in this matter - we are required to buy ourselves out of the current system which means we need to borrow this money. I must stress that, all things being equal, our tenants will be better off as a result."*

New advice service for Richmondshire residents



2012 saw the launch of a new advice service for people with debt, benefit or housing problems.

The service run by registered charity, Keyhouse, will give free, confidential advice to resolve money and housing problems.

It is funded by both Richmondshire and Hambleton District Councils.

Paul Eccles from Keyhouse said, "Money problems are a very common cause of people losing their homes. This service will work closely with

residents in the area to solve debt problems and make sure people get the benefits they are entitled to.

"There is no shame in getting advice. It's never too soon or too late to get help."

To access the service residents or other organisations should call the Keyhouse Advice Line on 01845 521458.

It is open from 10am until 1pm and 2-5pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Keyhouse can arrange to see residents at a variety of convenient locations across the districts and in some cases can make home visits.



keyhouse™
housing, advice, training

Appointments with Housing Officers...

Home appointment with Housing Officers are available.

Dedicated officers dealing with tenancy related issues - including rent issues, anti-social behaviour and changes to tenancies - can discuss

issues over the phone, via an appointment at the community office or at your home if required.

Contact either Samantha Hislop or Trish Skinner on 01748 827192/ 827190.

There are also dedicated officers to offer assistance with transfer - contact Lisa Thompson, Caroline Batty or Yvonne Coates on 01748 827186/828759/827189.

Right to Buy...

...can I buy my council bungalow?

All secure tenants of Richmondshire District Council can apply to the Right to Buy scheme.

There are some exceptions to it - in particular homes which are deemed suitable for

occupation by the elderly.

The Housing Act 1985, which introduced the legislation for right to buy, allows the landlord to refuse to let you buy on the grounds that your home is particularly

suitable for occupation by elderly people.

If you are refused the right to buy you can refer the case to a Residential Property Tribunal which will decide if the landlord is right.

Customer feedback - your views really do matter!

Did you find the information in Grapevine interesting and useful:

Yes No

What information would you like in future editions? _____

What are the three most important things to you? This will help us review our local offers and prioritise funding.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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

