

Help us to help you

The Riverside Group has commissioned research by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to gain better understanding of the needs and situations of its tenants.

This will help us to understand what sort of support you may need and the best way to get that help. During spring 2009 researchers from the PSI will interview a small number of tenants on three of our estates across the country. Tenants will tell researchers about their work and family life, and their experience of living on the estate.

Researchers will contact a selection of tenants on those estates and ask if they would like to participate in the research. We hope those of you who are contacted will take part, as it will help us to help you. **If you have any questions about the research contact Riverside Research Manager Amy Redman on Tel: 0151 295 6031 or Rebecca Taylor at PSI on Tel: 0207 911 7533.**

OUR NEW NUMBER

From the beginning of April, the new Riverside will have one telephone number on which all tenants can contact us.

You can contact our Customer Service Centre, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate). Tenants with inclusive call packages or mobile phones may find it cheaper to call on Tel: 0345 111 0000.

Taking care of communities

Riverside North East has teamed up with housing services provider Connaught to provide employment for a tenant on York's Coggan Close estate.



Peter Harrison joins Dave Pinder-Gibb, from Riverside North East, and Frank Cleaver and Danny Watson of Connaught

Connaught, which provides cleaning and maintenance services for Riverside North East, worked with us to recruit a local person to take up the role of Estate Caretaker.

Peter Harrison, who lives in Coggan Close, started his new job this month, which includes estate patrols, cleaning and grounds maintenance of the area.

If you require this magazine in another format e.g. large print or audio cassette or in another language, please telephone ☎ **0845 155 9001** or **0151 295 6519**

अनुवाद माटे अमने फोन करो

अनुवाद लਈ सानुं फोन करौ।

برای ترجمه به ما تلفون کنید

Çeviri için bizi arayın

अनुवाद के लिए हमें फोन करें

ترجمه کے لئے ہمیں فون کریں

欢迎电话查询翻译服务事宜。

若需翻譯服務，請致電我們。

اتصلوا بنا للحصول على الترجمة

برای ترجمه بما تلفن نمایند

We are happy and able to accept Tynetalk calls.



On the menu

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Eyes
and ears

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Former
Chair
retires

PAGE 5

A new beginning

Riverside North East is changing – but we will still offer our tenants the same service as before.

From the beginning of April, we will be known as Riverside, but other than changes to our logo and name there will be very little difference to the way we operate.

Our staff will still be based at our offices in Gateshead and Scunthorpe and we will still have a local Board to have a say on the day-to-day running of the organisation.

The idea behind the re-organisation, called Better Together, is to make savings that will allow us to invest more money into improving our homes and the services we offer to tenants. It also means that we are in a strong financial position despite the credit crunch.

Last year, we wrote to you about our future vision for The Riverside Group and our plans to create one combined organisation. In the last newsletter we explained how only a very small number of residents were opposed to the plans.

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Team scores with RNE



Riverside North East is backing a junior football team in a bid to support its younger tenants in the Blyth area.

Director Steve Ward is pictured with Blyth Town Under 11 boys. We are providing football strips and tracksuits and have set aside £1,000 to fund the team.

A new beginning

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However, a number of you also made some comments and raised concerns, such as whether the service we offer would be affected and whether the changes would have any impact on our repairs programme.

We do not expect there to be any changes to our repairs programme or our overall service.

Director Steve Ward said: "The idea behind Better Together is to improve the running of the organisation and ultimately the service we offer to tenants.

"We understand the importance of keeping a local presence in the communities we serve and hope tenants will feel their views, opinions and concerns have been taken into account."

• Turn to page 8 to read all about our new phone number for all your needs.

On the menu

East Howden and Walker residents were given food for thought at a healthy eating session supported by Riverside North East.

Locals took the chance to taste healthy options prepared on a budget, at a session run by Real Food Works, at East Howden community centre and a one-to-one hands on cooking session at the Kids Kabin, Walker.

As the recession looms and obesity rates soar Riverside North East is promoting value as the key ingredient and an alternative to high fat, fast food options.

Julie Riseborough, Head of Community Engagement, said:

"I think people were quite surprised at how easy it is to prepare cheap, healthy alternatives to processed or fast food. Real Food Works invited people to take a taste challenge with the meals they prepared – often using a microwave – and many agreed that they were a tastier as well as healthier option."



Elisha Carr tries out a healthy eating recipe

Meet the Housing Team – we're only a call away

Meet our Housing Team, based at our office in Gateshead.

If customers ask for a home visit we will make an appointment within five working days.

If you have a specific request, such as, an interpreter or a visit from a member of the same sex, we will arrange this as soon as possible. In an emergency, we will aim to visit you on the same working day.

To speak to a member of the Housing Team, call our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 155 9001 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6519.



Helen Wilson, Housing Services Manager; Jo Swan, Senior Housing Officer; Joanne Scott, Gillian Hamilton and Lynne Fiddes, Housing Officers; and Mark Nockels, Housing Services Co-ordinator

Affordable homes for Durham

Riverside North East has announced the first tenancy of its £2 million development to provide new homes in Durham.

We are working in partnership with developer Miller Homes to build 27 new homes for rent and shared ownership – part of a wider development of 200 in the Framwellgate Moor area, to be available in a phased development from now until 2010.

One of our first tenants is 30-year-old Amanda Richardson who recently picked up the keys to her first home, marking a milestone for Riverside North East.

Director Steve Ward said: “We are delighted to be able to offer Amanda a new home and a fresh start for 2009 in one of our



Flowers for Amanda's new home from Director Steve Ward

first developments in Durham City. We look forward to working with our partners Miller Homes to provide more much needed affordable housing for the people of Durham over the next year.”

Tenants for the new properties are nominated through Durham City Council.

Text pilot

Riverside North East has been running a pilot scheme allowing tenants to text us about issues including repairs and rent payments.

Because of low take-up, the future of the service is being considered. We are currently contacting all tenants that have used the facility to ask for their views.

Head of Community Engagement Julie Riseborough said: “For the customers that use text messaging, the service is incredibly valuable and this improves the customer experience. For example, customers with

hearing or speech impairments may find it easier to use text.

“The costs are relatively low, which makes it easier to justify continuing the service. And for customers who use Pay As you Talk mobiles being able to text is critical to managing their budget. But we may have to consider other options, as fewer than 10 tenants have used the service to date.”

If you would like to text Riverside North East to vote for the service to stay please send your name, the first line of your address and ‘keep text’ to 07781 472635.

Adaptations to your home

If a long-term illness or disability is making life around the home difficult for you or someone in your family, installing an aid or adaptation could improve your quality of life.

An adaptation is a piece of equipment, extra fitting or minor alteration in your home. Examples include grab rails/hand rails, walk-in shower/over-bath shower, door entry system, hoists/lifting equipment, vibrating smoke alarms and access ramps.

Who can apply?

If you are a Riverside North East tenant you can apply for an adaptation for anybody who lives in your home, provided there is a recognised need for the changes to be made.

If the adaptation is major, we may ask for a report from an occupational therapist to back up your request. And, if the work needed could change the structure or design of your home, it might be better for you and your family to move to a property more suited to your needs. If this is the case, we will try our hardest to find another home in which you are happy to live.

If you would like to learn more about aids and adaptations and find out how to apply, please contact the Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 155 9001 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6519.

Creating a bet

Youngsters in Benwell are set to become the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood as they graduate from a Junior Warden scheme at Canning Street Primary.

Riverside North East is working with Benwell Neighbourhood Management Initiative on the scheme, aimed at teaching youngsters more about the work of neighbourhood wardens in a bid to reduce anti-social behaviour in the area. We donated £1,000 towards the Junior Warden scheme as part of our commitment to transform lives and regenerate neighbourhoods. Sixty youngsters, aged 10 and 11, spent six weeks learning about the consequences of fly-tipping and graffiti, how victims of crime cope, as well as fire safety.

Julie Riseborough, Head of Community Engagement, said:

“The children feel like they are making a real difference in the community. People should not accept that their neighbourhoods will be littered and graffiti ridden. “If children develop intolerance to vandalism it’s a real



Junior Warden Kurham Hussa
Warden Don Pearson and Jun

A two-way conversa

Social housing tenants in England and Wales are set to take centre stage with the setting up of the watchdog Tenant Services Authority (TSA).

The TSA was created on 1 December 2008 and has taken over from the Housing Corporation as the lead regulator for housing associations. The TSA aims to be more tenant focused and is responsible for setting standards. It is inviting all tenants to have their say in

tter Benwell



ain phones in a report out on the street with Neighbourhood
ior Wardens Jordan Walker and Aisha Mihat

investment for the future. Junior Wardens report evidence of vandalism in the neighbourhood and now they're excellent role models for others."

tion

setting standards for social landlords – this is called the National Conversation.

The February meeting of the Tenants' Forum included a local consultation session, which was based on the materials provided by the TSA. The feedback from this session will be sent to the TSA and we will report the outcomes of the National Conversation in future editions.

Board member retires

Staff at Riverside North East said goodbye to retiring board member **Bill Renshaw** at a special lunch at the landlord's office in Gateshead. Mr Renshaw had a long career in social housing, as far back as the 1980s. As former chair of RNE's predecessor Newcastle and Whitley Housing Trust – one of the oldest housing associations in the North East – he has been both a board member and chair during periods of great change.



Sheila Philips, chair of RNE board with Steve Ward presenting a gift for retiring board member Bill Renshaw

Two years ago, the 64-year-old retired chartered surveyor and academic pioneered the partnership with The Riverside Group to form Riverside North East.

He said: "This seemed an appropriate time for me to retire. RNE is now well established and is growing to meet the social housing needs of many more people. It retains a unique voice and position in the North East, combined with the strength and vision of being part of a nationally respected housing association." Director, Steve Ward added: "It is with great sadness that we said goodbye to Bill Renshaw. He has been a fine asset to us for many years. We'll certainly miss his dedication, support and sound advice."

Meet the staff

Chris Thirlwell is Finance Assistant at Riverside North East

What do you enjoy most about your job and why?

Tea breaks and a 4pm finish on a Friday! Also being part of a friendly team to deliver a top quality service.

What is your biggest work related achievement so far?

Progressing from Clerical Assistant to Finance Assistant. This role gives me better opportunities to progress and gain extra qualifications, and through this new role I will be starting an accounting technician course in March which I am looking forward to.

What would be your one desert island item and why?

A football, it's my life outside of work - I just wish I was actually good at it. But I keep telling myself it's the taking part that counts.

What is your favourite book or film and why?

My favourite book would have to be The Sun newspaper - does that count? And my favourite film is Happy Gilmore, simply because it is the funniest thing I have ever watched.

Who would play you in a film about your life and why?

Matt Damon, he's pretty cool and I have, on occasions, been mistaken for him.



New ways to get involved

Last year we wrote to tenants with results of a review on resident involvement and to advise of the new structure for getting involved at local and national levels.

We now have volunteers to join groups on Repairs, Communications, Green Issues, Finance and Young People. We also have two volunteers to join the Federation Executive.

We have decided that if too many tenants apply to join one particular group, an appropriate selection procedure will be agreed. Membership will be for one year initially and we encourage other tenants to express interest so that we have suitable deputies and sufficient volunteers for the future.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- From 1 April 2009, gas operatives will no longer be required to be CORGI-registered. Instead they will need to be registered with the new Gas Safe Register.

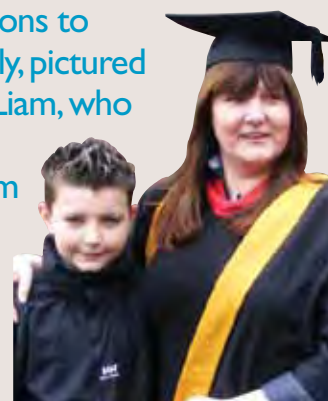
- Congratulations to our Chief Executive Deborah Shackleton on receiving a CBE in the New Year Honours List.

- Did you know that as part of the annual gas safety check, the gas engineer has to make sure that gas cookers are secured to the wall? If there is no safety chain, the engineer is legally obliged to tell you and it is your responsibility to have one fitted. This is for your own safety in case you lean on the cooker and it tips forward while you are cooking.

- Congratulations to the winner of the last newsletter competition, Ms J Berry of East Howden.

- Welcome to Leanne Scott, our new Clerical Assistant, and Chris Thirlwell who has moved into Finance.

- Congratulations to Joanne McNally, pictured with her son Liam, who recently graduated from Northumbria University with an MA in Human Resource Management.



- Hello to Mark Nockels, Housing Service Co-ordinator.

- We have not received any enquiries from customers wishing to become Tenant Inspectors. Training is due to start soon so please contact us as soon as possible – if you are not sure why not give us ring to find out more on Tel: 0845 155 9001 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6519.

HANDY HINTS

Here are some steps you can take to deter burglars from targeting your home and minimise the risk to your property.

- Don't leave windows open or doors unlocked, even if you are in the garden or near your house. A thief can get through the smallest window and might often try to open a door if there seems to be no-one around.
- Never leave car or house keys within sight of the letterbox or a window.
- Never leave spare house keys under a plant pot or doormat – burglars know all the 'secret places'.
- Security mark all your home and garden equipment with full postcode using a UV marker pen or permanent marker.
- Use internal timer switches for lamps and radios. This gives the impression that someone is at home which is particularly important during the dark nights.

Be aware of 'bogus callers' to your home:

- Use your door viewer (spy hole) and door chain before opening the door to anyone.
- Make sure visitors are who they say they are by asking to see their identity card.
- If in doubt, phone the visitor's company and check their details.

Thinking of improving your home?

If you are thinking of carrying out improvements or alterations to your home make sure you are not in breach of your tenancy agreement.

We always ask tenants to ask for our permission in writing before changing any aspect of their property. We do this for a number of reasons:

- we have to make sure that all work carried out in our properties is done to a high standard
- our properties need to conform to certain Health and Safety criteria, so we need to be aware of any changes to buildings to be certain they comply with the law
- there can be dangers from a wide range of substances in the home, including asbestos in older properties. Our contractors are specially trained in how to handle these.

If you are thinking of carrying out any alterations to your home, please contact our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 155 9001 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6519.

BRAINTEASER

A few simple security tips can help to keep you safe in your home. Can you find the 10 words in the grid below? Have a go – it's just for fun this time, but we will be running prize competitions again soon.

The words are:

Security Steering lock Police Break in
Fingerprint Window locks Safety Beware
Thief No doubt

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