

Northamptonshire Rural Life

The residents' newsletter for
**Northamptonshire Rural
Housing Association**

SUMMER 2017

www.northamptonshirerha.org.uk



Northamptonshire
Rural Housing
Association



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Remember to like
us on Facebook
and see all our
latest news.

Un-bear-lievable!

Residents in Braunston joined us for an un-bear-lievable afternoon last Monday to celebrate Rural Housing Week.

Bears of all shapes and sizes were brought along to a special teddy bear's picnic which marked the completion of Phase 3 of our new development. Local families, Board members and housing association colleagues enjoyed a fun afternoon with Summer refreshments, supporting the national week-long celebration of rural housing.

• Read more at www.northamptonshirerha.org.uk

BANK HOLIDAY CLOSING

Our office will be closed on Monday 28th and Tuesday 29th August for the Summer Bank Holiday. If you have an emergency repair, please call 0300 1234 009. If this number is unavailable, call 0203 701 3553.

For Your Benefit

Universal Credit – Annual Rent and Service Charge Changes

If you're living in an area where Universal Credit (UC) has now gone live and you are in receipt of this benefit, it's your responsibility to let the UC department know of any annual rent and service charge changes. You must advise the UC department during the Monthly Assessment Period after the date of the change and not before it comes into effect - otherwise the DWP will not accept the notification.

This year, if you're claiming UC and have not done this, you'll receive a text message asking you to call the UC department to let them know whether your rent and service charge has changed. If you don't receive a text message, it means that the department has already been notified by us of the rent and service charge changes for 2017.

Next year, however, you will need to report any changes using your UC online account. Please ensure you do this as soon as the rent change has taken effect as delays in providing the information could result in an underpayment of benefit. Or, if there is an overpayment, the money will be claimed back from you.

Universal Credit – Working Claimants

If you're working, and claim UC to top up your earnings, you may see your level of UC increase slightly. This is because, on 10th April, the rate at which earnings affect the amount of UC you receive, was reduced from 65% to 63%. This change takes effect from the beginning of the claimant's Monthly Assessment Period following 10th April.

Universal Credit – Looking for Work

Parents who have a youngest child aged three, including lone parents, are expected to look for work if they want to claim Universal Credit.

Anyone aged 18-21 who has been claiming Universal Credit for six months will have to either apply for training / apprenticeships or attend work placements.

For help and advice about Universal Credit, call the Helpline on 0345 600 0723 or contact our office and speak to the Housing Management Team.

Tax Credit Family Changes

People starting a family after April 2017 will no longer be eligible for the Family Element in tax credits. The equivalent in Universal Credit, known as the First Child Element, will also not be available for new claims from April 2017.

Child Tax Credit

A reminder that you can now only receive support through Child Tax Credit for two children. Any additional children born on or after 6th April 2017 aren't eligible for support.

Bedroom Tax Changes

People power can win! When a disabled couple took their bedroom tax case to the Supreme Court, they won, and the legislation has now been changed. The Government has announced that an extra bedroom can now be awarded to disabled couples who cannot share a room and to disabled children or non-dependants who need an overnight carer.



HOW TO... Tighten a lever door handle

Here's the latest guide in our 'How to...' feature to help you keep your property looking great and running well.

If your door handle is loose, look to see if it has screws you can see. If so:

1. Remove the screw on the bottom of the door handle and slip the handle off the rod.
2. Find the groove on the rod where the set screw needs to be secured.
3. Replace the handle, aligning the set screw hole with the groove.
4. Put the set screw back in and tighten firmly.
5. Repeat on the opposite side of the door.



Help us to help you!

It's so important that you allow us to gain entry to your property to carry out vital electrical condition reports. These reports are carried out every five years to ensure that your electrical installations are safe.

If your property is due for a check, you'll be sent a letter and our contractor will call you to make an appointment. If you need to cancel this appointment, please make sure you do it before the day itself or you could incur a £30 abortive callout charge.

If our contractor is unable to gain access to your property within the necessary timeframe, we will be forced to take legal proceedings which could lead to you incurring legal costs of up to £1,000 if the case goes to court.

So please, help us to ensure your homes are kept safe.

IN THE SUMMERTIME!

When you're out in the garden this Summer, please remember that your neighbours want to enjoy their gardens too.

- If you're planning a party, let your neighbours know – or invite them along!
- When the kids are out playing, try not to let their noise get out of hand.
- Don't let the kids kick a football against the neighbour's fence as it can be annoying.
- Your neighbours might not share your taste in music, so don't turn the music up too loud outside!
- Remember, you might still be outside when neighbours' kids are in bed, so be considerate.



DRYER SAFETY

Whirlpool has highlighted a safety concern with two types of tumble dryers, which could pose a fire risk. If you receive a letter saying that your tumble dryer is affected, please don't ignore it, but follow the advice in the letter.

If you're using any type of tumble dryer:

- Never leave it running when you go out.
- Remove the lint from the trap after every load of clothes dried.
- Don't cover the vent.
- Ensure the vent pipe doesn't have any kinks in it.
- Don't dry any cloths which have been used to soak up flammable liquids.

Ask us ...

Derek asked: Does my service charge include pruning the trees in my garden as I think they're getting too big?

Your service charge includes grass cutting, hedge and tree pruning on communal areas only. Please remember that you are responsible for the grass, the hedges and the trees in both your front and back gardens. If you have hedges or tree branches hanging over your back garden from a neighbour's garden, you are entitled to cut them back. Or you could speak to your neighbour about pruning them. We will only cut them back if the hedges or trees are on communal areas.

Have you got a question about your home or the services we provide? If so, ask away! We'll be answering one of your questions in every newsletter. Simply email them to sue.haywood@midlandsrural.org.uk



SHED SECURITY

Sheds can provide a really useful storage space, but just be mindful of what you keep in them and how secure they are.

- Make sure the shed has an adequate lock.
- Fix chicken wire to the inside of shed windows to make it more secure.
- Use plant protection such as thorny shrubs to stop people looking in.
- Mark your property with your postcode and record serial numbers and bike frame numbers.
- Think about locking valuable gardening equipment to the wall or floor.
- Photograph any valuable tools or bikes that you're storing so they could be traced if stolen.
- Check your contents insurance policy covers theft from your shed.
- Avoid putting flammable liquids, such as petrol, in your shed.

To join the Resident Involvement Board and have your say on how your housing association is run.



No need to attend meetings! Simply log on to the dedicated RIB website to share your views on current issues and services – and see action taken.

Email Theresa.Chamberlain@midlandsrural.org.uk to find out more.

NEW DECORATING CONTRACTORS



Leading painting, decorating and specialist coatings company, Bagnalls, is coming on board to help keep your homes looking great.

The family business has been awarded a two-year contract to look after all external painting and decorating and pre-paint repairs. They've already begun surveying properties in preparation for work over the next few months.

Residents will always be notified in advance about any planned work.

HOW WE'RE PERFORMING

The service we provide for you is of paramount importance to us. This is how we've done during the past financial year.

● COMPLAINTS

Four formal complaints were received and were acknowledged within three working days. All related to day to day repairs. One was upheld and one was partially upheld.

● COMPLIMENTS

Thirteen compliments were received – four for reactive repairs, three for garden maintenance, three for planned works, two for customer services and one for housing management.

● CALLS

94% of calls were answered within 20 seconds. Repairs are the most common reason for residents calling.

● REPAIRS

Overall repairs satisfaction was 87%.

● SCHEME SURVEY

Our scheme survey showed that 96% of residents are satisfied with the service we provide.

The top four priorities for residents are repairs and maintenance, the overall quality of your home, keeping residents informed and your neighbourhood as a place to live.

Did you know ... Our website had 5,473 new visitors during the last financial year and 2,005 returning visitors.

HERE FOR YOU

Our housing management team has recently undergone a restructure and we've replaced existing roles with new posts. This means we now have more staffing resources to help meet the challenges we face, in particular welfare reform, and to ensure we can maintain our service standards for you.

Mark Boon, who was previously your Housing Officer, has been appointed Housing and Income Team Leader and we're currently recruiting for a full-time Tenancy Services Officer.

If you have any housing questions or issues, call our Customer Care Team on 0300 1234 009 and they'll direct you to the best person in the housing management team.

OUT & ABOUT WITH SHERLOCK

Since we launched our new mascot, Sherlock Homes, he's been busy helping the team provide a great service for you, as well as finding out what's happening in our villages.



He was impressed with our new development at Braunston.



Sherlock helped the busy Customer Care Team answer calls from residents. On average the team handles 1,400 calls a month.

He headed out in the sunshine to visit some of our schemes.



is published by Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association, Whitwick Business Centre, Stenson Road, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4JP.

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