



The Gateshead Housing Company

# Leasehold News

Your home, your news

**Leaseholders**  
to be asked  
**views** on **future**  
of housing

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The Gateshead Housing Company  
Working with Gateshead Council

December 2011

# Welcome ...

To the winter issue of Leasehold News, which is full of useful information for leaseholders across the borough.

**In this issue you can find out how leaseholders will be asked for their views on the future of housing services across Gateshead.**

In late January, all customers will be asked to give their views on two options for how services are managed. See pages 4 and 5 to find out more.

If you are keen to shape any of the services you receive, then why not join our Service Improvement Group (SIG)?

We have SIG meetings coming up in January and February - so this is the perfect time to get in touch. See page 7.

You can also find out more about what leaseholders think of our services with survey results about billing and how we compare with other housing organisations across the UK - see pages 11 to 13.

And of course with the festive break coming up we want to make sure you are able to contact us over Christmas and the New Year. See page 14.

Finally, the Leasehold Services Team would like to wish all of our leaseholders and their families a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

We look forward to hearing from you,

**Janice, Laura and Helen  
Leasehold Services Team**



*(Left to right) - Janice, Laura and Helen.*

# Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders

**Customers should have all now received copies of The Gateshead Housing Company's annual report.**



The report covers all of the housing company's achievements during the year - as well as our plans for the future.

Specific information about our aims and progress over the last year, customer projects, the standards we should meet, our performance and how we spend your money also feature.

And the report covers the six standards originally set by the Tenant Services Authority.

These standards are:

- Involvement and empowerment

- Home - Repairs and maintenance and Quality of Accommodation
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Value for money
- Governance and financial viability.

It was produced for leaseholders, despite the original national guidance saying reports were intended only for tenants.

The housing company was keen to include leaseholders in a working group that decided the information in the 32-page report.

For further information visit [www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/annualreport](http://www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/annualreport)

# Leaseholders to be asked their views on housing review

The review of the future of housing services is reaching an important stage, with customers being informed two agreed options.

## Option 1 - The Gateshead Housing Company continuing to deliver housing services

This would see the housing company continue to provide housing services such as repairs, collecting rent and service charges, and improving homes.

The housing stock would continue to be owned by Gateshead Council and the Board would still oversee the work of the company.

## Option 2 - Housing services directly delivered by Gateshead Council

This would see The Gateshead Housing Company being wound up and absorbed back into Gateshead Council, which would then provide those day-to-day housing services.



## Is there funding to improve homes?

Both options would see enough money available to keep homes at the Decent Homes Standard through a rolling programme of modernisation and improvement.

But in both cases, the future investment needs of the stock would need to be found from other sources.

## What happens next?

In late January, leaseholders and tenants will be asked for their views in a postal and online 'test of opinion' on choosing either option 1 or 2.

**Leaseholders who want to know more can contact Wood Holmes on 0800 023 4705, e-mail [info@ghoia.co.uk](mailto:info@ghoia.co.uk) or visit [www.ghoia.co.uk](http://www.ghoia.co.uk)**



*Debbie Taylor of The Gateshead Housing Company talks to resident.*

The results, plus other factors such as cost, quality and efficiency will then be used by Gateshead Council's Cabinet to help inform the final decision on how services are best managed in the future.

# A win for Winlaton

There was an added bonus for Brenda Stewart when she completed the annual leaseholder survey - she won £100 of Metrocentre vouchers.



*Laura Chapman of the Leasehold Services Team (left) with Brenda Stewart.*

Brenda's entry was drawn at random from over 100 received and won the Stephenson Way resident a prize.

She said: "I enjoyed giving my views in the survey so this was a lovely surprise."

Laura Chapman, Leasehold Officer, said: "Our surveys really do help to shape the services that affect your home and estate."

The survey also revealed leaseholders' priorities for their home:

- 28.70 per cent said that value for money with service charges was of most importance
- 26.40 per cent said well maintained estates
- And 25.60 per cent tackling antisocial behaviour.

Look out for the 2012/13 survey in the new year.

# Some dates for your diary

Want to make a difference to leasehold services?  
Then why not join our Leasehold Service  
Improvement Group (SIG)?

The group meets every month between 10.30am and 12.30pm at the housing company's headquarters, Keelman House, at Team Valley. Help with transport can be provided.

Joint meeting with tenants  
from the HomeRepairs SIG



**Monday, 9  
January  
2012**



**Monday, 13  
February  
2012**

Discuss and agree service  
charge budgets for 2012/13

Identify customer service  
priorities for 2012/13



**Monday,  
12 March  
2012**

For more information about  
taking part in the group, contact the  
Leasehold Services Team.

# Transfer of private drains and sewers

**In October, the government transferred ownership and maintenance of many drains and sewers to water and sewerage companies.**

In Gateshead, Northumbrian Water has taken responsibility for the private sewer pipes that take rain and wastewater away from council owned properties, in addition to the public sewers the company already looks after.

## **What are my new responsibilities?**

As a flat owner, your landlord was responsible for the drains from your property to the sewer.

However since the start of October, Northumbrian

Water are accountable for the pipes that run from the main sewer to property boundaries.

Your landlord will remain responsible for drains that serve your property and are within its boundary, as well as gutters and downpipes.

**Please note, you will continue to be responsible for pipes within your property.**

## **What costs are involved?**

The transfer is good news for customers as it makes ownership and responsibilities much clearer, and lead to fewer disputes.





It is a fairer system with maintenance and repair costs shared across all customers.

The government estimates average bills may increase by between 25p and £1.17 a month.

Northumbrian Water has some of the lowest charges in the country and aims to keep bills as low as possible.

The company does not expect to see any increase in bills as a result of the transfer until at least 2014.

### What should I do if there is a fault with my drains?

Customers can still report any faults to the **HomeRepairs** Team on 0800 408 6008 or e-mail [repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk](mailto:repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk) who will determine whether the problem should be dealt with by Gateshead Council or Northumbrian Water.

If the job has been referred to Northumbrian Water, you may see a Kwik Flow operative on site, who will carry out work on their behalf.

For more information on the transfer visit [www.nwl.co.uk/privatedrainsandsewers.aspx](http://www.nwl.co.uk/privatedrainsandsewers.aspx)

# Boyd and Bell benefit from Direct Debit

**Two more lucky leaseholders have won £50 by simply paying their service charges by Direct Debit.**

Congratulations to Ashley Boyd from Beacon Lough and Victoria Bell from Bensham who were selected at random from the quarterly prize draw.

Arguably the easiest way to pay service charges, over 60 per cent of Gateshead's leaseholders already use the scheme and here's why:

- **It's convenient** - the payment comes directly out of your bank account, saving you time and money
- **It's your choice when the payment comes out** - leaseholders can make payments on the 1st, 8th, 15th or 22nd of each month
- **You're in control** - you receive payment details in plenty of time to raise any queries
- **One form to complete and you're all set** - all you need to do is set up one mandate form and your bank/building society does the rest
- **It offers security** - in the unlikely event of an error, you have a money back guarantee
- **And you could be a winner** - as you can see, leaseholders who pay by Direct Debit are in with the chance of winning £50 of shopping vouchers.

For more information contact the Leasehold Services Team.

# Survey **fits** the **bill**

**The majority of leaseholders are happy with the information and advice they are given about their charges and billing according to a recent survey.**

The Billing and Collection Survey, sent to leaseholders in October, showed that over eight out of ten customers were happy with the information they receive.

The survey also highlighted:

**81%** of customers were **satisfied** with the **information** they receive.

**This was 87% in 2010.**

**84%** of customers were **satisfied** that they were **able to speak** to the **right** person.

**This was 87% in 2010.**

**82%** of customers who **contacted** us were **satisfied** that their **enquiry** was dealt with **quickly** and **effectively**.

**This was 84% in 2010.**

**79%** of customers were **satisfied** with the **customer service** received.

**This was 91% in 2010.**

Results were slightly lower than last year and the team will be working with the Leasehold Service Improvement Group (SIG) to address any issues.

# Housing company **tops** the **board** for **areas** of leasehold **satisfaction**

**The Gateshead Housing Company's leasehold performance has been ranked against 31 local authority and arms length management organisations (ALMOs) in the country.**

The Leasehold Excellence Network provides benchmarking and performance statistics for the previous financial year (2010/2011).

The most recent report's key themes cover overall service satisfaction, leaseholder engagement, customer profiling, and satisfaction with repairs, income collection and arrears.

Some of the key results highlight:

**73%** were **satisfied** with services **provided** to **leaseholders**, since **their** organisation's **last** survey.

**This is higher than the sector average (64%) - ranking The Gateshead Housing Company 6.**

**97%** were **satisfied** with the **cleaning** standards and the **upkeep** of **communal** areas.

This is higher than the sector average (55%) - ranking The Gateshead Housing Company 1.

**82%** were **satisfied** with **neighbourhoods** and **services** on neighbourhoods.

This is higher than the sector average (71%) - ranking The Gateshead Housing Company 3.

**79%** were **satisfied** that **leaseholders' views** are taken into **account**.

This is higher than the sector average (56%) - ranking The Gateshead Housing Company 1.

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager, said:  
"These are some fantastic results for Gateshead as we compare ourselves with other organisations across the country.

"However we will not rest on our laurels and will continue to improve for the benefit of leaseholders across the borough."

# Contacting us over Christmas and new year



The Leasehold Services Team operate between Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 5pm, and 8.30am to 4.30pm on a Friday.

During the Christmas period you will be able to contact the team and HomeRepairs at the following times:

Leasehold Services Team	Date	HomeRepairs
8.30am to 5pm	◀ Wednesday, 21 December	▶ 8am to 7pm
8.30am to 5pm	◀ Thursday, 22 December	▶ 8am to 7pm
8.30am to 12 noon	◀ Friday, 23 December	▶ 8am to 5pm
Closed	◀ Saturday, 24 December	▶ 8am until 12 noon
Closed	◀ Sunday, 25 December	▶ Closed
Closed	◀ Monday, 26 December	▶ Closed
Closed	◀ Tuesday, 27 December	▶ Closed
8.30am to 5pm	◀ Wednesday, 28 December	▶ 8am to 7pm
8.30am to 5pm	◀ Thursday, 29 December	▶ 8am to 7pm



# Nowhere to park?



**The Gateshead Housing Company has garages to rent across the borough.**

Any Gateshead resident can apply to rent a garage, which are allocated to existing tenants first, followed by other customers.

**Rents start from £7.03 a week leaseholders.**

You could even get a discount on your insurance by parking your car in a locked garage.

For more information contact the Leasehold Services Team on **0191 433 5395** or e-mail **leasehold@gatesheadhousing.co.uk**

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