



The Gateshead Housing Company

Leasehold News

Your home, your news



Help for first-time buyers -
see pages 4 and 5.



The Gateshead Housing Company
Working with Gateshead Council

June 2012

Are you looking for useful advice on



Pick up a copy of our free **MONEY** matters guide packed with useful information and advice from any housing office.



Or go online at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/moneymatters for the latest **MONEY** matters news.

Welcome

It's been six months since the last issue of Leasehold News, in which time the housing company has seen some major developments.

Our front cover shot showcases our new development at Kibblesworth, where 13 new shared ownership properties will soon be available.

These two- to five-bedroom houses are being marketed to first-time buyers and offer an alternative means to get on the property ladder (see pages 4 and 5).

Also, you may have noticed Mears vans driving across the borough recently.

Gateshead Council awarded the three-year repairs contract in April, which will affect more than 800 leaseholders and 21,000 tenants every year (see pages 10 and 11).

You can also find out how the Leasehold Services Team performed over the last year (pages 12 to 15) and what our Service Improvement Group have achieved (pages 16 to 17).

And remember, if there's anything you'd like us to report on in the future then get in touch.

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



Housing company offers property solution for first-time buyers

A fantastic opportunity to help first-time buyers get on the property ladder has been launched by The Gateshead Housing Company.

13 two- to five-bed homes will soon be available for 'shared ownership' in Kibblesworth.

Shared ownership is a government funded part-buy/part-rent scheme to help first-time buyers to become home owners.

Customers can initially buy anything from 25% to 75% of the property value, and then pay rent on its remaining share.

Sarah Thompson, Head of Finance at the housing company, said: "We know how difficult it can be for first-time buyers

and are delighted to introduce this more affordable option.

"Shared ownership is more flexible as buyers can purchase a stake in a home, and then increase their share through 'staircasing' at a later date if they choose.

"These modern homes all have photovoltaic roof panels making them energy efficient, and come complete with a new kitchen, bathroom, allocated parking and a private garden."

Keelman Homes, a subsidiary of the housing



(Left to right) Shirley Ogle of Isos with Sarah Thompson from the housing company visit the new homes.

company who will manage the properties, has developed the site with overall site constructor Keepmoat.

Applications will be assessed by Isos, the HomeBuy agent for Tyne and Wear appointed by the Homes and Communities Agency, who will determine

whether customers can afford to buy a property without assistance and getting into financial difficulty.

Gateshead Council has contributed the land to enable the scheme to go ahead.

If you know someone who might be interested call 0191 433 5396.

'Self-financing' means better planning

From 1 April 2012 the housing finance system was replaced with a new scheme called 'self-financing'.

Self-financing means that councils keep all of the money raised from rents and service charges, which is used to manage the housing stock.

Previously rents and service charges were paid to central government and a subsidy system determined the money the council received.

The new system does not change the fact that all income from rent is kept separate from Gateshead Council's other functions and will continue to be used on managing housing stock only.

You can see the housing budget for 2012/13 on the next page (the figures have been rounded).

The difference between the money we receive and what we spend (around £6.1m for 2012/13), will be met from existing housing reserves.

For more information contact 0191 433 5368 or for help with managing your finances visit www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/moneymatters

Income (the money we get in)

Rent from homes	£70.6m
Other rental income	£1.1m
Service charges	£2.9m
Leaseholder charges	£0.2m
Other income (inc. grants)	£0.9m
Total	£75.2m

Expenditure (the money we will spend)

Repairs and maintenance of homes	£18.2m
Housing services (including letting homes, housing offices, estate services, collecting rent, tackling antisocial behaviour and employee costs)	£29.9m
Improving homes	£20.1m
Repaying government debts	£18.4m
Other costs	£0.8m
Total	£87.2m



Housing company rewards direct payers

Two lucky households have won £50 of shopping vouchers by simply paying their service charges by Direct Debit.

Congratulations to Leslie and Audrey McBeth, and Gail Blackwood of Harlow Green.

Arguably the easiest way to pay service charges, over 50 per cent of Gateshead's leaseholders already use the scheme because:

- It's convenient
- You can choose whether the payment comes out on the 1st, 8th, 15th or 22nd of each month
- You receive payment details in plenty of time to raise any queries
- You only need to set up one mandate form and your bank/building society does the rest
- In the unlikely event of an error, you have a money back guarantee
- Leaseholders who pay by Direct Debit are entered into a quarterly prize draw with the chance of winning £50 of shopping vouchers.

For more information contact the Leasehold Services Team.

Council retenders for buildings' insurance

Gateshead Council has started a tender process for the borough's low to high-rise flats' buildings insurance.

Procurement will affect almost 500 blocks, which are home to more than 800 leaseholders.

The current agreement with Zurich Municipal will expire in April 2013, and the council is working to ensure a new policy will remain competitive for leaseholders.

The policy covers structural damage caused by vandalism, storms, theft and subsidence, and possible insurers will be assessed on:

- Financial stability
- Public sector and housing experience
- Service delivery
- Technical ability/handling claims
- Cost.

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager, said: "The council can often procure a lower rate than is available elsewhere and ensure all households are adequately covered."

A first consultation has been made with customers who attended the leasehold forums in April, and all leaseholders will be written to in the future regarding the proposal.

For more information contact the Leasehold Services Team.

Mears are here

From April of this year, Mears began a three-year contract to carry out repairs and adaptations across Gateshead on behalf of the housing company.

Gateshead Council awarded the contract to provide more than 70,000 repairs to residents' homes a year.

More than 21,000 homes managed by the housing company will benefit from the new service, by implementing suggestions made by leaseholders and tenants.

Improvements include a new two-hour appointment system, the completion of more repairs on first visit and a 12-month guarantee on all work.

Neil Bouch, Director of Customers and Communities, said: "The

contract covers all repairs, making empty properties ready to let, gas servicing and adaptations.

"And we are delighted that customers' considerations have been taken into account."

The agreement will run until 2015, with the option to extend for another two years.

To report a repair call 0800 408 6008 up until 7pm weekdays, 12pm Saturdays, and 24 hours a day for emergencies.

You can also report repairs online at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/repairfinder



How we performed last year

The housing company has recently collated the results of leasehold performance for 2011/12.

The following information highlights the key outcomes for the previous financial year, in comparison with 2010/11.

Right to buy sales

	2010/11	2011/12
Applications	63	164
Freehold sales	19	17
Leasehold sales	0	3

	Up to 2010/11	Including 2011/12
Total freehold sales	13,122	13,139
Total leasehold sales	817*	810*

*Leasehold sales reduced as a result of the repurchase of properties on the Chandless estate and Clasper Village.

Service charges

	2010/11	2011/12
Estimated annual bill	£315,091	£323,831
Actual annual bill	£326,220	£338,014
Average annual bill	£399.29	£417.30

Service charge collection

	2010/11	2011/12
Charges due	£342,126	£370,203
Income collected	£333,199	£367,314
% income collected	97.39%	99.22%

Major works collection

	2010/11	2011/12
Collectable charges	£239,059	£167,962
Income collected	£213,193	£146,029
% income collected	89.18%	86.94%

Sarah Thompson, Head of Finance, said: "These statistics are vital for us as we continue to provide best value for money and shape services to suit our customers' needs."

Up to standard?

Leasehold performance is also monitored against the housing company's service standards, which were launched in 2010.

Service standard	2010/11 performance	2011/12 performance
The quality of leasehold information packs	No sales	80%
Number of leasehold information packs issued within seven days	97.56%	100%
Customer satisfaction with the services provided	72.90%	60.23%
Customer satisfaction with communal repairs and maintenance	Not collected	66.67%
Number of solicitor enquiry packs issued within seven days	88.24%	100%
Customer satisfaction with account information	87.30%	81.48%

Service standard	2011/12 target	End of year performance
% of dispute enquiries responded to within 10 working days	72.39%	93.06%
Number of leasehold enquiries responded to within 10 working days	83.13%	96.88%



Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager, said: "It is important that we monitor customer satisfaction to identify improvements and keep leaseholders informed on their rights and responsibilities.

"It's great to see that we have exceeded some of our targets, in terms of dealing with disputes and issuing information.

"And for those areas where we have not met the grade, we will continue to work with customers to improve our standards for the year ahead."

For more information on last year's results contact the Leasehold Services Team.

Leasehold group helps to improve customer service

Involved leaseholders have made significant changes to the service during the last year.

The Leasehold Service Improvement Group (SIG) meet every month to discuss customer priorities, which have since been incorporated into the team's priorities and group's work plan for the year ahead.

Recent activities include:

Repairing the procedure

In order to increase customer involvement in the scrutiny of repairs (see page 26), a customer procedural guide has been produced to help those involved.



Brushing up on homes work

In order to monitor customer satisfaction with the painting programme, all leaseholders are routinely contacted following the completion of the work.



You can 'account' on us

To ensure service charge costs are transparent and offer value for money, customers now scrutinise costs prior to issuing service charge invoices.



The invoices themselves have also been amended to make account information clearer.

Money, money, money



To help customers avoid getting into debt and the housing company to collect income, the SIG has worked with the team to develop a procedural guide for employees.

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager, would like to encourage new customers to join the group.

"Our SIG meet every month for two hours at a time, and you don't have to commit to every session.

"Help is available with transport and you really can make a difference to the services you receive.

"For further information on last year's changes and how to have your say, call us on 0191 433 5395."

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.

Discuss outcomes of the annual survey, scrutinise performance for quarter 1 and identify improvements.



**Monday,
9 July
2012**



**Monday,
13 August
2012**

Review leasehold management fees.

Consider changes to the benefits system and how leaseholders may be affected.



**Monday, 10
September
2012**



**Monday,
8 October
2012**

Scrutinise performance against service standards for quarter 2.

Review the process of notifying customers about building insurance claims.



**Monday, 12
November
2012**



**Monday, 10
December
2012**

Discuss the provision of an internal repairs service with Mears.

Scrutinise performance against service standards for quarter 3.



**Monday,
14 January
2013**



**Monday, 11
February
2013**

Discuss and agree service charge budgets for 2013/14.

Identify customer service priorities for 2013/14.



**Monday,
11 March
2013**

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

Housing company paints the flats red (well not literally!)

The Gateshead Housing Company has announced which blocks of flats and maisonettes are set to have a makeover during the coming year.

Part of the company's seven year painting programme, leaseholders living in blocks on the following estates will be affected during 2012/13:

- Abbey Court, central Gateshead
- Argyle Estate, central Gateshead
- Claremont, central Gateshead
- Dunston Hill
- Dunston Road
- Holmside, Dunston
- Marian Court, Bensham
- Sunnyside.

Surveys will be carried out on estates before the

work begins to determine exactly what is required.

Neil Bouch, Director of Customers and Communities, said: "The programme will make a real difference to the look of many homes and estates across the borough."

The Leasehold Services Team will write to customers in the near future to confirm their inclusion in the programme and provide information on the work and costs.



**Carbon
monoxide,**

**it's invisible,
it's odourless,
it's tasteless...**

it's too late.

Every year dozens of people across the UK die from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning caused by gas appliances and fires that have not been properly maintained.

The Gateshead Housing Company takes a serious approach towards gas servicing, and checks should be carried out every 12 months.

The housing company can provide a gas service of a property to leaseholders for around £40 - prices may vary depending on the number of appliances.

Call 0191 433 5395 for more information.

A sprinkling of high-rise safety measures

A high-rise block in the centre of Gateshead is set to have groundbreaking fire safety work carried out to help keep its residents secure in their homes.

Regent Court, a ten-storey block with 160 residents, will have an innovative sprinkler system fitted to all flats, as well as communal areas.

The unique design of the 1950s built block meant conventional fire safety improvements weren't possible as part of the housing company's rolling programme.

'Retro-fitting' the system to a high-rise block has never been done in the region before and fire experts think it could be a solution for similar buildings in the future.

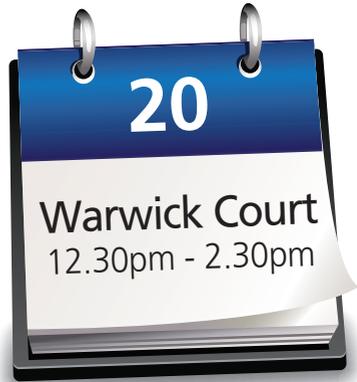
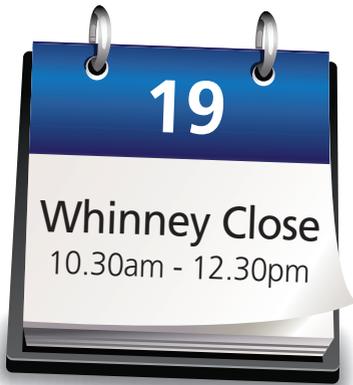
In the event of a fire, sprinklers in the affected room would activate, stopping it spreading further in the flat or to any neighbouring homes.

Neil Bouch, Director of Customers and Communities, said: "We are delighted to be leading the way in ensuring our high-rise residents stay even safer in their homes."

The work is part of a major programme between the housing company and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to bring 29 blocks up to the latest fire safety standards.



Ian Bell of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and Rebecca Weightman of the housing company showcase the new sprinklers.



*Meet your
Leasehold Services Team*

Do you want to help us improve services or have you got a query about:

**HomeRepairs?*

**Or any other leasehold matter?*

**Service charges?*

**Home improvements?*

Well come and meet your Leasehold Services Team on:

- **Monday, 18 June** - from 10am to 12pm at Wrekenton housing office
- **Tuesday, 19 June** - from 10.30am to 12.30pm at Whinney Close communal lounge
- **Wednesday, 20 June** - from 12.30pm to 2.30pm at Warwick Court communal lounge
- **Thursday, 21 June** - from 2pm to 4pm at Felling housing office
- **Friday, 22 June** - from 9.30am to 11.30am at Dunston housing office.

For more information call Janice, Laura or Helen on **0191 433 5395** or e-mail **leasehold@gatesheadhousing.co.uk**

You can also contact us by:

- Minicom on 0191 433 5349
- Fax to 0191 433 5354
- Text 'LEASE' and your message to 0762 480 4167

Have you got an eye for quality?

Then why not join the Leasehold Service Improvement Group to inspect the repairs made to your block?



(L-R) Helen Craig, Leasehold Officer, and Jackie Bell of Acomb Court, scrutinise repairs.

The group are on the lookout for new members to assess communal repairs, prior to the issue of quarterly repairs and maintenance statements.

You don't have to attend any meetings as you will be sent a list of repairs to your block and their costs each month, and asked:

- Whether the job has been completed
- To rate the quality of the work
- Whether it offers value for money.

Full training will be provided.

For more information on how you can take part, contact the Leasehold Services Team.

Your Leasehold Services Team

Leasehold services is a three-strong team that work to provide help and advice to over 800 leaseholders across the borough.

The team operate Monday to Thursday, 8.30am until 5pm, and Friday, 8.30am until 4.30pm.



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