



The Gateshead Housing Company

Leasehold news

Bringing you housing news

November 2006

Leaseholders help with plain lease



A new easier to understand version of your lease has been produced, with the help of leaseholders.

A copy of the 'plain english version' of the lease is with this newsletter and it is hoped that the information will be useful for the company's 700-plus leaseholders across the borough.

The 36-page guide explains the legal jargon and details of the lease that all leaseholders receive and was produced after leaseholders identified it as a something that would be of use to them.

As well as getting their view on the guide, Gateshead Council's legal team have also played a

major role in producing the guide.

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager said: "The guide will be extremely useful for all of our current and future leaseholders.

"It explains a lot of the important legal information about being a leaseholder in a more simple way.

"So why not put the guide with your lease and then if you do have a query the guide will be there to answer your questions."

Further copies of the plain lease are available by calling the Leasehold Services Team. See page 8 for their contact details.



Left to right, Judith Ramsay of Gateshead Council's Legal Services and leaseholders Enanul Choudhury, Philip Lawrie, Magret Chataika and Jackie Bell, join Janice Adams of The Gateshead Housing Company's Leasehold Services Team to launch the new plain english guide to the lease.



You asked

**WE
DID IT**

A number of improvements to the Leasehold Service have been made, thanks to the involvement of Leaseholders themselves.

Through the regular forums and meetings, as well as focus groups and surveys you have helped change the services you receive now and in the future.

Recent improvements have included Leaseholders helping with:

- *The Compact 'Shaping the Future'*
- *'The Complete Guide to becoming a Leaseholder'*
- *A plain version of the lease (see page 1)*
- *Quarterly statement reports*
- *Online accessibility of service charge accounts (see page 3)*
- *Recruiting employees for the company*
- *Develop the Moving Forward Customer Training Programme (see page 3)*
- *Select the training provider for the courses.*

If you want to get involved in the future and improve services even more then call Linda or James on 0191 433 5380 or e-mail involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Anti-social tenants shown the door!

The Gateshead Housing Company has come down hard on to tenants who caused misery at multi-storey blocks.

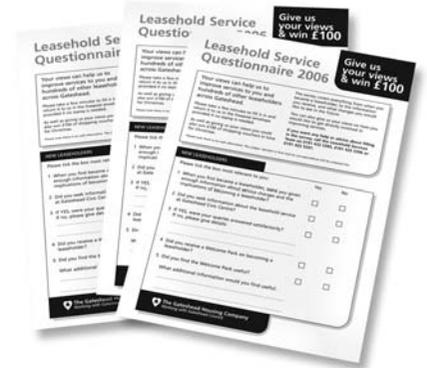
Sophie Lomax, 24 of Monk Court and Caroline Trzcinski, 28 of Bensham Court were both evicted for anti-social behaviour by themselves and their visitors.

Ms Trzcinski's eviction was a landmark one - as she was on a six-month extension to her Introductory Tenancy, something now giving the company more chances of evicting problem tenants through the courts.

The housing company has a number of other cases pending in multi-storey blocks relating to rent arrears and anti-social behaviour.

Survey will get your views

With this issue of the new-look Leasehold News there is the chance to give The Gateshead Housing Company your views on being a leaseholder.



The company's annual leasehold survey is enclosed, and as well as giving us your views you could also win £100 of shopping vouchers in time for Christmas.

The survey covers everything from when you became a leaseholder, to the information you receive, and what changes you would like to see in the future.

You can also give us your views on how you would like to get directly involved in improving services.

Last year, the annual residents' survey results were:

- **69% of Leaseholders were satisfied with services offered**
- **69% were satisfied with opportunities for involvement**
- **92% were satisfied with their neighbourhood**
- **100% were satisfied with their home**
- **67% thought service charges were value for money**
- **74% thought the company provided enough information**
- **74% thought they got enough information about their service charge account.**

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager is keen that every leaseholder fills in the survey.

She said: "Getting the views of leaseholders through this annual survey will play a major part in helping to improve services.

"Last year's survey has helped us to make improvements during the past few months and we want to carry on making those improvements over the coming year."

If you want any help or advice about filling in the survey, call the Leasehold Services Team on any of the numbers on page 8 of this newsletter.

Go online to see your account

After Leaseholders asked the company for easier access to their service charge accounts the company has now launched an online option.

Leaseholders can now check the balance of their account or make a payment with the click of a mouse!

And don't worry if you don't have access to the internet - it's available free of charge to anyone who lives works or studies in Gateshead.

Ask at your local library for more details about free internet access.

How to check the balance of your account online

- Log onto The Gateshead Housing Company's website at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk
- Click on 'Make a payment'
- Click on 'Check your leasehold service charge balance'
- Select your account type: **Leasehold Service Charges**
- Enter your payment reference and click 'Request Balance'

How to make a payment on line

- Once you have checked your balance if you would like to make a payment
- Click on 'Make a payment'
- You will enter a secure site where you can make a payment by following the instructions on screen.

If you have any query about your account balance, please contact the Leasehold Services Team on 0191 433 5396.



Free courses for leaseholders

The Gateshead Housing Company is offering Leaseholders the chance to take part in a number of free, practical training sessions to help change housing services for the better in the borough.

Forthcoming 'Moving Forward' courses include:

- Understanding HomeRepairs - Tuesday, 23 January 2007, 9.30am to 4pm
- Anti-Social Behaviour - Wednesday, 28 February 2007, 9am to noon
- Achieving Value-for-Money (VFM) - Tuesday, 27 March 2007, 9am to noon.

Leaseholders wanting a free place on the course or a full course programme should call 0191 433 5380 or e-mail involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Want to make the news?

The Gateshead Housing Company is looking for leaseholders to literally help 'make the news'.

The company is looking to set up an editorial readers' panel for its regular newspaper and newsletters, with at least one leaseholder sitting on it

Initially leaseholders' involvement may just be looking at proposed news lists or feature ideas from home or on the internet, before the newspaper goes to print.



But, in the future, leaseholders could get involved in writing articles, getting training, and seeing how a professionally designed newspaper is planned, written, designed and printed by the experts.

Anyone interested in finding out more, should call 0191 433 5380, 0191 433 5382, or e-mail involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Everything you ever needed to know

The company's Leasehold team get regularly asked similar questions by quite a few of our leaseholders.

So we decided to produce a series of the questions - and of course their answers - in this new-look Leasehold News.

If you have a question you would like answered in a future issue of Leasehold News then get in touch with the team on page 8.

What is a service Charge?

Service charges are payments made by you to the landlord (Gateshead Council) for all the services that are provided.

This may include items such as repairs, lighting, cleaning or caretaking, where these apply to your block of flats.

As a leaseholder, you have to pay a share of the cost of these repairs and services, and these costs are called Service Charges.

What do my service charges cover?

Your service charges will depend upon which services your block of flats receives.

There is a separate charge for each individual service, which can change from year to year.

You will be charged for the following services, where they apply to your block:

- Caretaker
- Cleaner
- Lighting
- Communal Aerial
- Lift Maintenance
- Door Entry
- Structural Insurance
- Upkeep of grassed areas
- CCTV
- Concierge
- Communal heating
- Management Fee
- Ground Rent

What are my repairs and maintenance responsibilities?

You are responsible for the inside of your flat or maisonette, and any service pipes and cables that serve your flat only.

This includes items such as heating, internal doors, pipe work and decoration.

know about being a Leaseholder

Can I sublet my property?

You have the right to take in lodgers or rent your flat to anyone you want to. You do not have to ask our permission, but you must let us know.

You should contact our Leasehold Services Team as sub-letting may affect your buildings insurance.

If you sub-let, please give us your new address so that we can contact you.

What sort of alterations do I need permission for?

Any addition or change to the structure or services in your home, including:

- Fixtures and fittings such as heating and kitchen units
- Aerials or satellite dishes
- Outside decoration. The type of paint may need approving so that its compatible with future paints that we may use.

Can I replace my windows?

If you want to do this you must ask permission from your housing office.

If you install you own windows and doors, your painting charge will reduce.

What is the insurance charge?

We pay for the structural insurance on your flat and then you are charged a share of this as part of your service charges.

The insurance policy covers structural damage caused by vandalism, storms, theft and subsidence.

What are The Gateshead Housing Company's repairs and maintenance responsibilities?

We will keep in repair the structure and exterior of the building and the common parts.

This includes roofs, drains, windows, external doors, communal lighting and shared paths.

If you have any other questions see your 'Guide to being a Leaseholder', contact the Leasehold team (see page 8 for details) or log onto www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/yourhome/leaseholder.htm



The Gateshead Housing Company
Working with Gateshead Council

Are you missing out?

Pension Credit is an entitlement for people aged 60 or over.

This could mean extra money for you every week. Pension Credit guarantees everyone aged 60 and over an income of at least:

- £114.05 a week if you are single
- £174.05 a week if you have a partner

Also, if you or your partner are 65 or over you may be rewarded for saving for your retirement, up to:

- £17.88 if you are single
- £23.58 a week if you have a partner

You may still be able to get Pension Credit if your weekly income is more than these amounts if, for example, you or your partner:

- Are a severely disabled person
- Look after a person who is severely disabled
- have certain housing costs - for example, mortgage interest payments and service charges.



Even if you're only awarded a small amount, it may mean that you can get help with other things such as Council Tax Benefit.

To apply for Pension Credit:

- You can call 0845 6060265
- Call the application line on 0800 991234
- By textphone to 0845 6060285
- On-line at www.pensions.gov.uk/pensionscredit
- In writing to Pensions Services (Pensions Credit Dept), PO Box 40, Seaham, SR7 7AQ.

Leaseholders give housing views

The Gateshead Housing Company recently asked leaseholders to come and give their views on housing at three Leaseholders' Forums, held across at Gateshead during September.

They got the chance to meet the company's Leasehold Services Team, hear more about how they can get more involved in future housing decisions and set the agendas for two main forums held last month.

Leaseholders wanting to know more about future meetings should call the Leasehold Services Team - see page 8 for more details.

New finance director for housing company

The Gateshead Housing Company has appointed a new Director of Finance, who's role will include working with the company's Leasehold Team.



Jon Mallen-Beadle, 37, has joined the housing company from Tristar Homes in Stockton, where he was Head of Finance and Company Secretary.

Jon said: "I am delighted to be joining The Gateshead Housing Company at such an exciting time for leaseholders, with us building on the success of last year's two-star rating from the Audit Commission."

Estate Tours make a difference to leaseholders

The Gateshead Housing Company has made a number of improvements to neighbourhoods across Gateshead thanks to leaseholders involvement in 'Estate Tours'.



The outcomes of recent tours range from improvements in security to tackling anti-social behaviour and ones directly affecting leaseholders.

This included cameras being installed at Beacon Court in Wrekenton to curb anti-social behaviour and areas around Marian Court in Bensham being landscaped.

Details of forthcoming Estate Tours are published in the latest issue of the company's regular customer newspaper, and are available from any housing office and also online at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/yourestate/estate_tours.htm

Pigeons success

Leaseholders at Willerby Court in Harlow Green have been singing the praises of one of the company's Caretakers.

Bert Willis recently helped to solve a feather problem at the block - an abundance of pigeons.

After helping to reduce the problem by relocating the birds, leaseholder

Mrs Lowery wrote to the company to compliment Bert of the "good job he is doing", specifically with "environmental issues around the block."



It pays to pay by Direct Debit!

Almost half of the company's leaseholders have taken up the option of an easy way to pay their service charges - and for two leaseholders it paid off even more!

Michael Burton of Bensham and Daniel and Cheryl Goodbarn of Dunston were the first winners of a prize draw amongst leaseholders who have chosen to pay their charges by Direct Debit.

Both Michael, pictured right and Daniel and Cheryl each received £50 of shopping vouchers simply for paying their charges through their bank account.

To sign up for the Direct Debit option, simply fill in the enclosed form and return it to the housing company - it's as easy as that.



Carole Burns of The Gateshead Housing Company's Leasehold Services team presents Michael Burton of Bensham with his shopping vouchers.

And you could be the next winner - hopefully just in time for Christmas or the New Year sales.

Carole joins Leasehold Team

The Gateshead Housing Company's Leasehold Services Team has a new member - Carole Burns.

Carole recently joined the team and has already spoken to lots of Leaseholders to answer their queries already.

Here's a profile of the three-strong team.

Janice Adams is the Leasehold Services Manager and her role is to manage the team and make sure a good quality service is provided.

Tel: 0191 433 5396 e-mail: janiceadams@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Helen Craig is the Leasehold Officer and is responsible for dealing with enquiries in relation to invoices, transfer of leasehold properties and arrears collection.

Helen also coordinates the production of the quarterly repairs and maintenance statements for leaseholders and organises the Leasehold Forums.

Tel: 0191 433 5395 e-mail: helencraig@gatesheadhousing.co.uk



Helen Craig, Janice Adams and Carole Burns.

Carole Burns is the team's new Clerical Assistant and she helps to support the rest of the team.

Carole is currently responsible for Direct Debit payments, notifying leaseholders of repairs to be carried out to the block and arrears management.

Tel: 0191 433 5397 e-mail: caroleburns@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Useful contacts

Leasehold Services Team

Write:

Leasehold Services Team, The Gateshead Housing Company, Suites 1, 2, 4 and 5, Baltic Business Centre, Saltmeadows Road, Gateshead, NE8 3DA.

Web: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/yourhome/leaseholder.htm

Janice Adams, Leasehold Services Manager

Tel: 0191 433 5396 Fax: 0191 433 5354
e-mail: janiceadams@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Helen Craig, Leasehold Officer

Tel: 0191 433 5395 Fax: 0191 433 5354
e-mail: helencraig@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Carole Burns, Clerical Assistant

Tel: 0191 433 5397
e-mail: caroleburns@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

HomeRepairs -

Open till 8pm weekdays, till noon on Saturdays and 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for genuine emergencies.

Call: 0800 408 6008 Fax: 0191 433 5496
Text: 0762 480 4167 (keyword REPAIR)
E-mail: repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk
Click: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Neighbourhood Nuisance

Call: 07799 583197

Gateshead Police Call: 0191 454 7555

Gateshead Council Waste Collection Service

Call: 0191 433 7000 Fax: 0191 478 1138
e-mail: enquiries.localenvservices@gateshead.gov.uk

Tenant Involvement Team

Call: 0191 433 5380 Text: 0762 480 4167
e-mail: involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk