

The Gateshead Housing Company

news

Providing excellent homes and housing services JANUARY 2004



A word from the chairman



Dear tenant or leaseholder,

I would like to take this opportunity to firstly wish you and your family a happy New Year, and secondly to introduce you to The Gateshead Housing Company.

From this January, The Gateshead Housing Company is aiming to change the face of council housing in Gateshead forever.

Over the next seven years, we intend to work with Gateshead Council to make up to £232million of improvements to thousands of the borough's council homes.

During the past year, Gateshead Council has talked to and listened to its residents, as part of plans to set up The Gateshead Housing Company, to manage its council housing in the future.

And last September, almost 94 per cent of residents, who took part in a borough-wide survey, supported those plans to make improvements to council housing. Since then we have been working on setting up The Gateshead Housing Company.

Because of massive public support for those plans, the company could receive an additional £63million of Government funding starting this Autumn, potentially leading to twice as many major improvements being made to local houses every year after that.



The £63million would be the first instalment of a possible £232million of Government funding over the next seven years, all dependent on The Gateshead Housing Company getting a 'two-star' Government rating, when its housing service is inspected this Autumn.

Although The Gateshead Housing Company is a new name to you all, most of the employees of the new company have come from Gateshead



Council, bringing a wealth of local housing expertise with them.

Other Gateshead Council employees will continue to carry out the majority of day-to-day repairs and many of the improvements, as part of contracts between The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.



The Gateshead Housing Company is directed by a board of 15 people, made up of five local councillors, five tenants and five independent people.

These are exciting times, but in a way it is 'business as usual'.

You will continue to have Gateshead Council as your landlord, looking after your interests - and you will also have The Gateshead Housing Company looking to improve housing across the borough.

I hope you share our enthusiasm for the work that The Gateshead Housing Company will be doing over the coming years.

But of course if you have any queries or questions you want answering, please do not hesitate to telephone us, or call into your local housing office.

Ken Childs
BOARD CHAIRMAN - THE GATESHEAD HOUSING COMPANY



Welcome to The Gateshead Housing Company News

Welcome the first issue of The Gateshead Housing Company's newspaper, which is exclusively for tenants and leaseholders across Gateshead.



The newspaper, which will be produced four times a year, is set to bring you the latest news on how the new company is working with Gateshead Council to improve homes across the borough.

As well as news about plans to make thousands of improvements to homes across Gateshead over the next seven years, the newspaper will also give readers the chance to find out more about new schemes and initiatives, that will help to improve homes, estates, and indeed whole neighbourhoods.

There will also be regular features on the people working in housing offices, repairs teams and other jobs, who will be helping the company to make those improvements to housing in Gateshead.

We hope that you enjoy reading this first issue of The Gateshead Housing Company's newspaper, and that you find news on the company and its plans useful.

If you have any comments or ideas for stories and features, please call Ian Clarkin at The Gateshead Housing Company on 0191 433 2071, or e-mail him at ianclarkin@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

You can also write to The Gateshead Housing Company, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH.



The Gateshead Housing Company.
Registered Office: Civic Centre, Regent Street,
Gateshead, NE8 1HH.
www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk

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New name in local Housing

The Gateshead Housing Company, set up after residents gave a huge 'thumbs up' to Gateshead Council's plans to make major improvements to housing, came into existence this month.

The company will manage Gateshead Council's housing, and could receive £63million of Government funding later this year.



Employees from The Gateshead Housing Company help to unveil the company's new logo.

IMPROVEMENTS

The £232million of overall funding, should it be secured, would be used by The Gateshead Housing Company to make tens of thousands of major improvements to council houses by 2010.

The company's recently announced vision is, 'working with the community, to provide excellent homes and housing services.'

The company will achieve this by being;

- Customer focused, innovative and professional - involving customers in what we do.
- Being honest, accountable and transparent - delivering excellent services with integrity.
- Caring and respecting - the people we work for and with.
- Committed to all our employees - celebrating our successes.
- Being positive and responsive - constantly striving to achieve excellence.
- Being motivated, trained, and committed across the company - delivering efficient and effective services.

- Embracing equality - valuing difference.
- Being a listening and learning organisation - staying in touch with what customers want.

OBJECTIVES

This year, the company has a number of objectives, including the following;

- Achieve the successful launch of the company.
- Set and deliver clear standards for customer service.
- Achieve a minimum 'two star' Government rating, at inspection.
- Meet the requirements of the management agreement.
- Establish an effective partnership with Gateshead Council.

The longer-term goals of The Gateshead Housing Company are to deliver a three star 'excellent' service, and to improve homes to the 'Gateshead Standard', which is even higher than the standard set by the Government.

Isabel is a winner

The Gateshead Housing Company certainly helped one of its residents have a 'Merry Christmas' recently, when it handed over shopping vouchers as part of a competition it held across Gateshead.

The vouchers, which went to Isabel French of Rowlands Gill, were the result of consultation with local tenants and leaseholders across Gateshead to decide on the new look and logo for The Gateshead Housing Company.

Dozens of entries were received from across Gateshead, with the feedback and comments being used to finalise the new logo, which will appear on all leaflets, posters and information from the new company, as well as on signs at housing offices across the area.

Mrs French, whose name was first out of the hat from all of the entries, was presented with her vouchers at her local Highfield housing office.



Competition winner Isabel French is presented with her prize by Heather Skipper, Housing Management Assistant, left, and Jocelyn Snowball, Estate Officer.

www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Residents with access to the internet will be able to keep up to date with the work of The Gateshead Housing Company on its new website.

The website at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk is being developed

to allow tenants and leaseholders to find out more about the services that the company will offer.

The website, which is linked to

Gateshead Council's own site at www.gateshead.gov.uk will eventually allow tenants and leaseholders to report repairs online, as well as take part in a number of other innovative housing initiatives.

Residents who don't have access to the internet at home, can get free access at a number of Gateshead Council buildings across the borough.

As well as computer access at all local libraries, Gateshead College and Gateshead Council, there is also free Internet access at over 20 UK Online points across the borough, as part of the overall learning grid.

To find out more contact your local library, Gateshead Central Library on 0191 477 3478, or UK Online on 0191 490 0300.

A new look

The first thing that people in Gateshead will notice with The Gateshead Housing Company are changes to the offices that offer housing services across Gateshead.

Changes to signage, both inside and outside of almost 20 offices took place over New Year, as



Offices across Gateshead, such as the one in Springwell, have had new signage and branding fitted.

part of plans to make local tenants and leaseholders aware that the new company is in existence.

UPDATED

All signage, displays, posters and leaflets will eventually have the new company's logo on them - and will be phased in as and when they need to be updated or reprinted.

This is being done in order to carry out the changes at the lowest possible cost.

A series of information leaflets and posters, featuring information on the most commonly asked questions and information requests is also being produced.

The leaflets, which will follow a simple colour theme, will enable new or existing tenants and leaseholders to get up-to-date information and advice on housing issues.

Tenants will be involved in the production of the new leaflets and information. If you are interested in getting involved by coming to focus groups, or even doing it from home, please fill in the feedback form on page 11 of this newspaper.



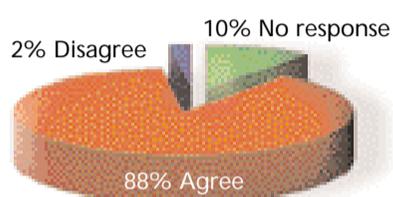
Your housing views

Last September, Gateshead Council sent a questionnaire to all tenants and leaseholders asking them for views on plans to set up The Gateshead Housing Company.

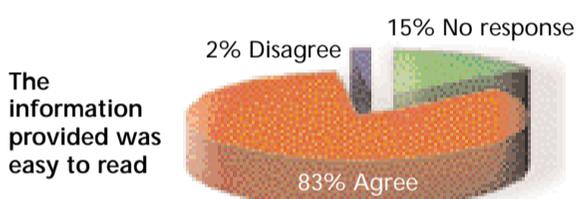
During the past year, Gateshead Council kept local people informed about the process, through Council News, leaflets, letters, meetings and articles in the local press.

Almost 94 per cent of residents, who took part in the survey, supported the plans, and also gave approval to how Gateshead Council handled the consultation process.

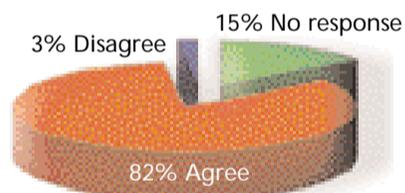
The vast majority of residents found that the information they received had been useful, clear and easy to understand. Here are the main findings of the questionnaire from the respected independent market researchers MRUK.



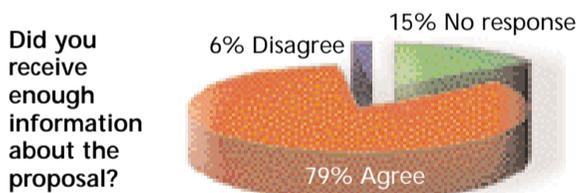
The information was useful



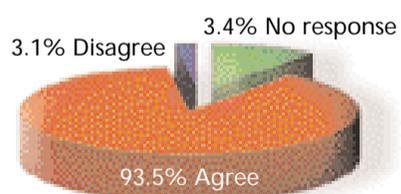
The information provided was easy to read



The information was easy to understand



Did you receive enough information about the proposal?



Did you support Gateshead Council's proposals to set up its own company to manage council housing?

Tenants also gave views on what The Gateshead Housing Company's priorities should be.

The most important choices were anti-social behaviour, modernising council houses, improving the repairs service, security, involving tenants and improvements to estates.

Tenants' opinions will now be a permanent feature in The Gateshead Housing Company's long-term plans.

The story behind The Gateshead Housing Company

In just over a year, Gateshead Council has turned a Government strategy into a fully-fledged company, looking after over 24,000 council homes.



Above: Local people have been involved at every stage of the plans to set up The Gateshead Housing Company. Below: Councillor Mick Henry, Leader of Gateshead Council celebrates tenants' 'yes' result.

A great deal has happened in those two years, and local people have been involved in every step of the way..

2001 - The Government announces all council housing in England must meet a 'decent' standard by 2010.

Councils that will not have enough money to meet the standard must look for new ways to raise the money.

Gateshead Council only has £100m available and needs £330m. It begins to look for ways to raise the shortfall.

September 2002 - Housing Consultants, Housing Quality Network, inform Gateshead Council that it has three options to consider:

1. To look for private money to manage the homes.
2. To transfer the council homes to another landlord.
3. To set up an 'arms length' company to manage council homes.

October to November 2002 - Gateshead Council invites tenants and leaseholders to come to 40 meetings to give their views on the options. Over 1,000 people attend.

January 2003 - Gateshead Council writes to residents to tell them the outcome of the meetings.

Setting up an Arms Length Management

Organisation (ALMO) to manage the homes was felt to be the best option for Gateshead.

May 2003 - Gateshead Council submits a formal bid to the Government.

The bid asks for £232m to set up an ALMO to improve council homes over the next seven years.

June 2003 - A mix of local tenants, councillors and independent people will manage the ALMO.

Local people are asked to join the management board

July 2003 - The Government announces that Gateshead Council's bid has been successful.

Up to £232m is available, which could mean 97,000 home improvements.

September 2003 - In order to receive the money, Gateshead Council must show that local people support the plans.

Every tenant and leaseholder is asked to fill in a questionnaire giving their views.

October 2003 - Almost ninety four per cent of local people, who took part in the questionnaire, support the plans.

November 2003 - The ALMO becomes known as The Gateshead Housing Company and local people are asked to help choose a logo.

January 2004 - The Gateshead Housing Company opens for business.



Welcome from the board

The Gateshead Housing Company is set to have a board of 15 local people, who will direct the work of the company, as it aims to carry out thousands of improvements to homes across the borough by 2010.

The first meeting of The Gateshead Housing Company's board took place just before Christmas to agree the initial vision, values and objectives of the company.

The board will eventually be made up of 15 people - five local tenants, five Gateshead councillors and five independent members, representing all parts of the borough.

APPOINTED

The five tenants and councillors, pictured below, have already joined the board, with the five independent board members from the local and business community due to be officially appointed by the end of January.

The tenant board members are - Stanley Dawson from Sheriff Hill; Jim Willis, from Ryton; Malcolm McKie, from Beacon Lough; John Biggs, from Biggs Bensham; and John Burns, from Leam Lane.

The five local councillors are - Ken Childs, a local councillor in the Bede area; Peter Mole, a local councillor in Wrekendyke; John W Hamilton, a local councillor in Chopwell and Rowlands Gill;

Patrick Rice, a local councillor in Teams; and Joe Hattam, a local councillor in Lamesley.

TASKS

The board will over the coming month's and years carry out a number of key tasks, including agreeing a yearly budget and plan, as well as working closely with Gateshead Council on the delivery of the improvements across Gateshead.

VISION

Ken Childs, Chairman of The Gateshead Housing Company said: "The vision of The Gateshead Housing Company is simple.

"We will be 'Working with the community, to provide excellent homes and housing services.'"

PUBLIC

Board meetings will be open to the public and held in Gateshead Civic Centre, at 10am, on the following Thursdays: 15 January, 12 February, 11 March, 8 April, 13 May, 10 June and 8 July.

Other meetings to be confirmed in the next issue of this newspaper.

New managers for housing company

To help run the company, a number of senior managers have moved from Gateshead Council to the new company, bringing with them countless years of experience in local government and housing.

Bill Fullen, Chief Executive of The Gateshead Housing Company, has over 20 years of experience in housing, starting his career as an advice worker for the Tyneside Housing Aid Centre.



Prior to taking up his new role he was Gateshead Council's Director of Neighbourhood Operations.

Whilst at Gateshead Council he has had a number of posts including The Avenues Agency Manager, Neighbourhood Housing Manager and Assistant Director of Letting and Development.



Colin Stockwell, Company Secretary and Solicitor, joins the company on secondment from Gateshead Council, where he was Head of Commercial and Development in Legal and Corporate Services.

He has been a solicitor in local government for almost 25 years, and has past experience of housing management issues at Middlesbrough, Beverley, Nottingham and Sefton.

Peter Burchall has been seconded as Director of Property and Technical Services to The Gateshead Housing Company from Gateshead Council's Local Environmental Services.



There he was responsible for Gateshead Council's repairs and maintenance and capital programme to housing, schools and public buildings.

He has worked for Gateshead Council for almost 12 years and previously for Northumberland County.



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The Gateshead Housing Company board, back row, left to right, Ken Childs, Pat Rice, Peter Mole, John W Hamilton, Jim Willis and Joe Hattam. Front row, left to right, Stanley Dawson, Malcolm McKie, John Biggs and John Burns.

Local people can join housing area boards

Local people are being given the chance to help with The Gateshead Housing Company's plans to make £232million of improvements to the borough's council housing.

Two local area boards, with tenants and leaseholders from across the borough being invited to sit on them, are currently being set up.

TENANTS

Area boards will work with the company's main board, which is made up of five local councillors, five tenants and five independent members.

The boards will help to ensure that the quality and standard of services and improvements to council homes in local areas is what people really want.

Tenants have come forward from the east and south of Gateshead, however, tenants in the centre and west of the borough in particular are still being invited to get involved in the process.

As well as using the contact details below, you can also fill in the feedback form on page 11 of this newspaper.

PLANNED

Tenants who would like to know more about the work of the planned local area boards can call into The Gateshead Housing Company Housing Offices, or telephone 0191 433 2653 and leave their contact details.



Ken Childs, your company chairman

Every good company needs a good chairman - and there is little doubt that The Gateshead Housing Company couldn't be in better hands than with Ken Childs.

Your questions answered

Here's a useful reminder about why The Gateshead Housing Company is now providing your housing services.

What is an 'Arms Length Management Organisation' (ALMO)?

The Gateshead Housing Company is an ALMO, which means it is fully owned by Gateshead Council, but operates independently.

Why did Gateshead Council set up an ALMO?

ALMOs can obtain money that is not available to councils, in this case up to a possible £232m.

Is the £232m guaranteed?

To receive the funding The Gateshead Housing Company must show it provides a good service by getting a 'two star' rating, when it is inspected this August.

Can The Gateshead Housing Company get two stars?

Housing services are currently rated as 'one star' so changes are needed. Over the past year there have been many improvements, which tenants have praised.

The Gateshead Housing Company is confident that Government Inspectors will also be pleased with the changes and will award two stars.

Can you explain who does what?

Gateshead Council is the owner of the homes and deals with long term issues, such as homelessness and rent policies.

The Gateshead Housing Company is the manager of the homes and deals with day-to-day issues like collecting rent, booking repairs and keeping estates clean.

What will happen to tenancies and rights?

Rights and tenancies stay the same because Gateshead Council still owns council homes and is still the landlord.

Ken, who is combining his role as Chairman, with his role as a local councillor in the Bede area, is committed to giving local people the best housing possible.

"It's all about partnership", says Ken, born and bred on Split Crow Road, and who has lived in the Mount Pleasant area for most of his life.

"The Gateshead Housing Company will work with the community, to provide excellent homes and housing services.

"To do that, we will work with Gateshead Council and our tenants, to deliver the homes and services that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead."

Ken, ex British Telecom engineer and manager, is no stranger to the good and bad side of housing in the past, having himself lived in a Gateshead Council flat a few years ago.

"Maybe in years gone by there were frustrations, where things did go wrong, but I think that Gateshead Council worked hard to put them right.

"It's up to The Gateshead Housing Company to carry on with that work."

SOLID

The Gateshead Housing Company is building from a solid base, but, according to Ken, it's not just about new kitchens and other improvements.

"The whole thing about The Gateshead Housing Company is that it's about helping people and the whole area.

"It's not just about a new kitchen or bathroom. We really do want to help to improve the road outside your front door and the estate beyond.

"After all it would make no sense to spend thousands of pounds improving someone's home if they didn't feel safe outside their door, or didn't like the area they lived in."

MAJOR

Tenants are going to play a major role in the work of the new company.

"There is an enormous amount of work to do by 2010," says Ken. "And involving tenants will be central to this work.

"We are hoping to introduce a rolling three-year programme, so local people know exactly when

they will benefit from the work, and allow them to decide for instance, whether they decorate their houses or not before they are part of the programme.

"Hopefully we will see the repairs and improvements programme become even better, with a better appointments system and more personalised systems."

He is also keen to see local people get involved in a more direct way - through The Gateshead Housing Company's area boards.

"As well as having tenants from across the borough on the company's main board, we also want local people to join the two area boards.

"Those tenants, along with the local councillors and the independent members will be a good team - and will get us thinking ahead."

EXPERIENCE

Ken is also quick to praise the employees of the company, who are bringing countless years of housing experience with them from Gateshead Council.

"I think we are going to see even better results as we concentrate day-to-day on just housing", he said. "As well as using the extra resources well, we all know why we are doing this - for the tenants and the wider community."

"There are exciting times ahead for The Gateshead Housing Company, and more importantly for our thousands of tenants and leaseholders."



Ken Childs talks to a local resident about The Gateshead Housing Company's future plans.

Residents give 'thumbs up' to housing improvements

Local residents have given a huge 'thumbs up' to the thousands of improvements that Gateshead Council and its employees have made to council homes in the past twelve months.

A new survey has found nine out of ten council tenants across the borough were happy with the improvement work that was carried out in their homes during the past year.

VERY HAPPY

The survey of almost 2,000 residents who had houses rewired, heating fitted, or had new kitchens and bathrooms installed, found that 90 per cent who responded to the survey were, 'very happy' or 'happy', with the work.

As well as showing how pleased people were with the improvements, the survey also showed Gateshead Council to be performing well when it came to organising and carrying out the thousands of improvements.

TIMETABLES

Residents also said that they were given plenty of notice that the work was going to be done, and that Gateshead Council stuck to agreed timetables, and also kept disruption and disturbance to a minimum.



Gateshead Council employees have been praised for their work in helping to improve local homes.

Ken Childs, Chairman of The Gateshead Housing Company, said: "The Gateshead Housing Company is committed to giving local people the opportunity to have a good, decent standard of housing. Our employees across the borough will play a huge and vital role in those plans.

"It is great news that so many residents have said how pleased they are with the work Gateshead Council has done over the past year, and

The Gateshead Housing Company is committed to making even more major improvements over the coming years."



Housing booklet is invaluable



Council tenants are being kept up to date with improvements to their housing services, thanks to Gateshead Council and The Gateshead Housing Company.

As part of its commitment to improve the lives of local tenants, Gateshead Council recently produced a new booklet to explain the changes and improvements that are happening.

The booklet, which was sent to 24,000 tenants and leaseholders in December, is 'pocket sized' so that it can be kept in a shopping bag, or next to a phone, without taking up much space.

Even though the booklet is small, it contains plenty of information on how to report a repair, paying bills by direct debit, contacting a housing office, how to find a home in Gateshead, and how to check workmen are genuine employees.

Local people warned over housing myth

Gateshead Council is urging local people to ignore anyone who tells them that the council house 'Right to Buy' scheme is about to stop for good.

The warning is being issued after a number of local people have recently been misleadingly told that changes could happen as a result of The Gateshead Housing Company starting to manage Gateshead Council's housing.

ASSURING

Although the Government has recently implemented steps to prevent abuse of the system in the South East, Gateshead Council is assuring council tenants that most tenants have the right to buy their homes - and will continue to have that right.

As a result of national publicity about those Government steps, Gateshead Council has been inundated with enquiries from people wanting to know more about the right to buy situation, and from residents concerned about their ongoing application.

WARNED

Those tenants have been reassured about the position, and other tenants are being warned to be wary of any leaflets and cold calls from finance companies saying that radical changes are to be made to the scheme in Gateshead, or that it is ending.

Tenants or leaseholders who want more information about the housing plans or the right to buy scheme, should contact their local Housing Office, or Gateshead Council's Right to Buy Team, on 0191 433 2633.

Keep your energy bills down

Your gas and electricity bills during the winter months are always higher than the rest of the year, but according to the Energy Savings Trust you can still keep warm and reduce your bills at the same time.

Here are their top five winter tips to save energy and reduce your energy bills.

- 1 Be nice to your icebox - Fridges and freezers are the most hardworking appliances in our kitchens using £1.2 billion worth of electricity every year. So don't leave the door open longer than necessary.
- 2 Close your curtains - As the days get chillier, closing your curtains at dusk will stop heat escaping through windows.
- 3 Buy an energy efficient lightbulb - Trade up to energy saving lightbulbs - they cost from just £5 and last 12 times longer than a standard bulb.
- 4 Take a Home Energy Check - To see how much energy can be saved in your own home call your local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on 0800 512012 for free.
- 5 Look out for the logo - If you're off to the New Year sales, look out for the Energy Efficiency Recommended logo when buying new electrical appliances.

The trust's website at www.saveenergy.co.uk has lots of information about energy savings, including energy efficiency grants.

Tenants all say “we’ve got

While everyone seems to have been trying to learn numbers such as ‘118 118’ and ‘118 500’ in the past few months, residents in Gateshead can definitely say, “we’ve got your number”, when talking about The Gateshead Housing Company.



Helen and The Gateshead Housing Company's repair reporting team.

The number they have been chanting is 0191 433 7777 - the number for tenants to call if they want to report or enquire about a housing repair.

Since last June, when Gateshead Council launched the repair reporting service, now managed by The Gateshead Housing Company, operators have taken over 70,000 calls in the Gateshead-based offices.

Although the team is small, just twelve in total, they are answering calls at a rate of over 3,000 a week, from residents wanting repairs from a leaky tap, to a roof falling in.

And the day we visited the centre was no exception.

Margaret Toberty, Team Leader of the service certainly knows a thing or two about customer service and housing, after working in estate agency for 15 years, as well as for British Airways and financial services.

Margaret, who hails from Windy Nook, sees team spirit and a range of personalities, as the key to the success of the service.



Margaret

She said: “We have employees ranging from their 20’s to their 50’s, and there is a great team spirit here.

“Most of the team has been here since the very start, and I think that helps a lot.”

She has some advice for residents using the service. She said: “When you are calling, it would be useful to have a pen and paper handy and note down the order number you get, as well as the name of the person you speak to.

“The system is still developing, and residents having that number and name to hand if they call back, can certainly help us speed things up even more.”

And talking of speed, Martyn, seems to be handling calls at a pace.

In the space of just over a minute, he takes a call from a resident who is concerned over a leaking roof.

He gets the details, reassures the lady something will be done today, and starts to process the request for a repair to be done by Gateshead



Martyn

your number”



Iain

Council in the space of seconds - with the resident he says being, “very happy with the prompt service.”

With other people taking calls it seems every few seconds you might expect the atmosphere to be noisy and confusing.

Well far from it, the atmosphere is calm, reassuring and pleasant - something that means that local residents’ repairs are being reported promptly and efficiently.

In fact the majority of tenants’ requests are being handled by the team, with over nine out of ten people happy with the system.

But underneath that calm exterior it can get very busy at times - especially on Mondays and Tuesdays - when everyone seems to call, and during the winter months, when there are calls about heating and hot water pipes.

Margaret Toberty is keen to stress that it’s not as if they, “Don’t like Mondays” - far from it.

What she wants to say to residents is, “unless it’s an emergency, try not to call on a Monday or Tuesday morning, as you may find it harder to get through.

“Don’t forget the team take calls right up until 8pm from Monday to Friday, and the number is available 24 hours, seven days a week for emergencies.”

But for some people the more calls and work the better - such as Alison, who lives in Wardley.

“I thrive on pressure and prefer being busy”, she says, after a number of years working for the AA insurance group.

But just because the team is busy, it certainly doesn’t mean that standards slip. “It’s all about being efficient, calm and reassuring all at the same time,” says Alison.

Quite a few of the team worked for Gateshead



Gillian



Teresa

Council before joining the repair reporting service last year, such as Teresa.

She told us that, “I’ve really enjoyed working in the team, the work is quite different from my time in Birtley housing office.

“The Gateshead Housing Company is also going to be an exciting challenge -

but we know we are all working towards improving the service and helping local people.”

Judith, who also worked for Gateshead Council, prior to joining the team at the start, was helping with employee training that day.

She said: “We are always looking for ways to continually improve the service. It’s also good that the team is a stable one, with pretty much the same people being here from the start.”

When you’re dealing with around 3,000 calls a week, you might think you’d get a bit sick of talking on the telephone.

But not Lyndsey, the chatterbox of the team: “I love talking, so this is the ideal job for me.

“I especially enjoy taking the ‘thank you’ calls.

“When people say thank you it shows that Gateshead Council is providing a good service, and it’s a great boost for the team too.”



Lyndsey

Finally, Margaret spoke on behalf of the whole team, saying, “The Gateshead Housing Company is an excellent idea for the people of Gateshead, and we are all keen to play our own part in making it happen.”



Sheila

Call us when we are quiet!

**The best times to call us are;
Monday to Friday 3pm to 8pm**

**Saturday 8am to noon
0191 433 7777**

Working closely

As well as Gateshead Council, The Gateshead Housing Company will be working closely with another major housing scheme in the borough.

The NewcastleGateshead Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder is a 15-year project covering 78,000 homes.

It will tackle the issue of low demand housing by involving local communities, the private and voluntary sectors to create places where people want to live.

BID

In February 2003 the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, announced NewcastleGateshead and eight other Pathfinder projects nationally will be able to bid for a share of £500 million over the next three years.

The Pathfinder covers the Gateshead wards of Bensham, Bede, Felling, High Fell, Leam and parts of Dunston, Teams, Saltwell, Deckham, Pelaw and Heworth, as well as areas of Newcastle.

REGENERATION

A draft scheme submission for the NewcastleGateshead Pathfinder has been put together. It addresses how the broad aims of regeneration can be taken forward to help create communities where people want to live.

Working with you to make housing better

The Gateshead Housing Company aims to improve the quality of life of local people, and the services provided by the new company will have a real impact on this.

Working closely with tenants will allow the company to develop a service that is in tune with your needs, and that’s why we want you to get directly involved with us.

You don’t need any special skills to get involved, apart from the ability to voice your opinion!



Over the coming year, we are aiming to produce information that is user friendly, up-to-date and relevant to our tenants, and to make sure we’re achieving this, we’d like your input.

We want to set up a small group of tenants who can meet up to talk about the information we currently produce, and suggest any improvements.

Tenants who have access to e-mail could even get involved in this process without coming to meetings, as we could e-mail information to you and you could feed back in your own time.

To find out more please call Andrea Wheatley on 0191 433 2653, or e-mail her at andreawheatley@gatesheadhousing.co.uk You can also return the form on page 11 of this newspaper.

Down your way at Sheriff Hill

The Gateshead Housing Company's offices come in many shapes and sizes, with some of them to peoples' surprise, literally being a house!

One of those 'neighbourhood' offices is in Sheriff Hill, where a small team, lead by Housing Manager Hazel Forster, looks after the housing needs of residents.

Hazel has worked in housing for twelve years, in Birtley, Teams, Low Fell, Gateshead Civic Centre, Springwell and now at Sheriff Hill for the second time.

APPRECIATE

Hazel, who hails from Low Fell, enjoys the close knit feel of the converted house. She said: "We have a real 'family' feeling here, and I think that residents appreciate that."

Part of the 'family' is Karen, who returned from London to her North East roots a few years ago, and now works between Sheriff Hill and the Town Centre offices of The Gateshead Housing Company.

Karen, originally from Felling, likes the office, saying: "We get residents in every day, mainly about rents, letting and repairs that need doing, and we pretty much know everyone's name."

FRIENDLY

"Everyone is very friendly, and I think that people here enjoy popping into the office to get things sorted out."

Another 'Southerner' who returned to her local roots, is Joanne, here to handle the weekly benefits advice morning.

Joanne, who came back the area from Shrewsbury, enjoys the feeling of the small office, and looks forward to her turn there.

Adele is another vital part of the housing team, where she works as a Housing Management Assistant, splitting her time between Sheriff Hill and the Trinity Square offices in Gateshead Town Centre.

Completing the team are Estate Officers, Ray and Michele, with almost forty years of housing



The Sheriff Hill team - back, left to right, Malcolm, Karen, Ray, Michele and Adele. Front Hazel.

experience behind them - admittedly most of it down to Ray, who has 28 years with Gateshead Council and now the new housing company.

But Michele is certainly not lacking in housing experience, having spent 11 years in Low Fell and Sheriff Hill.

Her job involves her inspecting empty and vacated properties, to see if they need repairs or refurbishment, and also showing potential tenants around homes.

"There is a good demand here," she says. "What we see is a lot of people living in the area for a long time, perhaps as a large family, and then as children move out, we help older people to get a smaller place."

REASSURING

Ray splits his time between Sheriff Hill and Dunston, and has always worked in housing, something that seems to be a reassuring trait amongst the company's employees.

"I started in 1975 as a rent collector in Wrekenton, and then worked in the Springwell area, before I came to Sheriff Hill - and I've lived in Leam Lane more or less all my life."

He is looking forward to working for The Gateshead Housing Company, and building on Gateshead Council's work.

"I think the new company is going to be a

success, especially as people overall know they already get a good service and are happy. Hopefully we can make it even better."

One of the first 'family' members at home was Gateshead Council's Neighbourhood and Street Warden, Malcolm, who will continue to work closely with The Gateshead Housing Company .

He starts his tour of the area at 9am, and has no idea how far he walks during the week - but it must be miles and miles!

SUCCESSFUL

He said: "The scheme has been really successful. I think people see me as a friendly face, who can help them."

"I get out every day talking to people, especially our older residents, giving them advice, helping solve problems, and trying to make the area better."

Malcolm is proud of the work in stopping anti-social behaviour at the nearby reservoir. "We all worked together", he said. "It certainly made residents feel safer, and that also helps to lift an area even more."

Housing Manager, Hazel Forster sums it up for everyone saying, "The Gateshead Housing Company can take the good work of Gateshead Council, and move on to even bigger and better things."

How things have changed.....

Back in 1833 tinkers and hawkers were still numerous at Sheriff Hill.

The mining village was very much out of repair and people lived in very dirty and squalid conditions.

The name 'Sodhouse' derives from the fact that most of the houses on the bank were sod huts built from the local turf and mud by the tinkers.

In 1886 Back Sodhouse Bank, which was below Kells Lane, was condemned and demolished. See pictures right.





Homes to rent

The Gateshead Housing Company has properties suitable for single people, couples, families and also older people.

For information on the properties call The Gateshead Housing Company on the numbers below, or pop into your local housing office.

One bed bungalow - Tribune Place, Sheriff Hill. Gas heating. Over 50s or disabled applicants only. £46 per week. Contact Michele or Ray on 0191 433 6190.

Sheltered retirement studio - The Lonnen, Ryton. Gas heating, warden and communal lounge. For people aged over 60. £49pw. Contact 0191 433 6172.

One and two bed flats - Derwent Tower, Dunston. Gas heating, secure door entry, CCTV and caretaker. Singles or couples over 25 only. £46.64pw (one bed) and £50.29pw (two bed). Contact Trish on 0191 433 5850.

One and two bed flats - Redheugh/Eslington Courts, Teams. Concierge and electric storage heating. Suitable for singles or couples. From £48pw. Contact Carla or Gwen on 0191 433 6135.

Sheltered retirement studios - Derwentside, Whickham. Gas central heating, 24 hour warden, secure entry and communal lounge with panoramic views. Singles over 60. From £52.35pw, including heating & warden service. Contact Michelle on 0191 433 8888.

Sheltered retirement studios - Victoria House, Teams. Gas central heating, 24 hour warden, pleasant garden and courtyard. Suitable for single pensioners. From £51.33pw, including heating. Contact Carla on 0191 433 6135

Sheltered retirement studio - Birtley. Resident warden, gas central heating, communal lounge, close to amenities. Aged 60 years and above. £58 per week, includes heating charge Contact Ivy on 0191 433 6102.

Sheltered retirement studio - Cresthaven, Felling. Communal lounge, warden control, laundry and secure entry. From £52.63pw, inc heating. Contact Pauline on 0191 433 8080.

One bed bungalows - Bill Quay. Warden control, gas central heating, maintained gardens. Suitable for pensioners. From £46.55pw. Contact Jim on 0191 433 8080.

Spacious bedsit - Sir Godfrey Thompson Court, Felling. Ducted air heating system. Close to all amenities. Mature singles. From £39pw. Contact 0191 433 8080.



Housing Offices

The Gateshead Housing Company has offices across Gateshead who are there to help tenants and leaseholders with queries about their housing needs.

Here are their addresses and telephone numbers. Please see page 12 of this newspaper, for the opening hours of the offices across the borough.

Central Area Housing Office -
24-26 Trinity Square, Gateshead, NE8 1AW.
Tel: 0191 433 6161 Fax: 0191 433 3710.

Dunston Housing Office -
5-6 Tower Court, Ravensworth Road, Dunston,
Gateshead, NE11 9AZ.
Tel: 0191 433 5850. Fax: 0191 433 5851.

Felling Housing Office -
Booth Street, Felling, Gateshead, NE10 9EW. Tel: 0191
433 8080. Fax: 0191 433 8077.

Gateshead Council @ Birtley -
16 Durham Road, Birtley, Gateshead, DH3 2QG. Tel:
0191 433 6102. Fax: 0191 433 6127.

Gateshead Council @ Blaydon -
5 Wesley Court, Blaydon, Gateshead, NE21 5LS. Tel:
0191 433 6202. Fax: 0191 433 6227.

Highfield Housing Office -
4 Park Road, Highfield, Gateshead, NE39 2JJ.
Tel: 0191 433 4900. Fax: 01207 544 015.

Leam Lane Housing Office -
Fewster Square, Leam Lane,
Gateshead. NE10 8XQ.
Tel: 0191 433 5888. Fax: 0191 433 5885.

Low Fell Housing Office -
576 Durham Road, Low Fell,
Gateshead, NE9 6HX.
Tel: 0191 433 5858. Fax: 0191 433 5871

Old Fold Neighbourhood Office -
The Bede Centre, Old Fold Road,
Gateshead, NE10 0DJ.
Tel: 0191 433 5800. Fax: 0191 433 5805.

Ryton Housing Office -
Grange Road, Ryton, Gateshead, NE40 3LT.
Tel: 0191 433 6172. Fax: 0191 433 6179.

Sheriff Hill Housing Office -
6 Ermine Crescent, Sheriff Hill,
Gateshead, NE9 5QQ.
Tel: 0191 433 6190. Fax: 0191 433 6189.

Springwell Neighbourhood Office -
140 Aycliffe Crescent, Springwell Estate, Gateshead,
NE9 7DH. Tel: 0191 433 5844. Fax: 0191 433 5838.

Teams Neighbourhood Office -
Unit 5-6, Teams Craft Workshops, Askew Road West,
Gateshead, NE8 2FB.
Tel: 0191 433 6135. Fax: 0191 477 4044.

Whickham Housing Office -
School Building, Whickham,
Gateshead, NE16 4EG.
Tel: 0191 433 8888. Fax: 0191 488 7562.

Wrekenton Housing Office -
143-145 High Street, Wrekenton,
Gateshead, NE9 7JR.
Tel: 0191 433 5822. Fax: 0191 433 5833.

The Gateshead Housing Company is keen to get local tenants involved in helping to make the company a success.

If you would like to get involved in local area boards, helping us to make literature and leaflets as useful as possible, or have any other thoughts or ideas, then please fill in the form below.

You can drop the form into any of The Gateshead Housing Company's local offices or post back to us using the address below.

I am interested in getting involved in (please tick as many as you like); Area boards Information/leaflets This newspaper

Other (please give details):

Name: _____ Address: _____

Tel no: _____ e-mail: _____

Post to: Andrea Wheatley, The Gateshead Housing Company, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH, or drop into any local housing office.



- Central Area
- Felling
- Leam Lane
- Low Fell

- Teams
(closed 12.30 to 1.30pm)
- Whickham
- Wrekenton

Mon, Tues and Thurs
8.45am to 5pm
Wed 8.45am to 3.45pm
Fri 8.45am to 4.35pm

- Gateshead Council @ Blaydon
- Gateshead Council @ Birtley

Mon, Tues and Thurs
9am to 5pm
Wed 9am to 3.45pm
Fri 9am to 4.35pm

- Dunston Mon to Fri 8.45am to 1pm
- Old Fold Mon to Fri 8.45am to 1pm

- Sheriff Hill Mon to Fri 8.45am to 1pm
- Dunston Activity Centre (payment office)
Mon to Fri 10am to 2pm

- Highfield
Mon, Tues, Thurs 1.30pm to 5pm
Wed 1.30pm to 3.45pm
Fri 1.30pm to 4.35pm

- Ryton Mon to Fri 8.45am to 12.30pm

- Springwell
Mon, Wed, Thurs and Fri 8.45am to 3.45pm
(closed 1pm to 2pm)
Tues 8.45pm to 1pm
Mon evenings 5pm to 7pm

- High Lanes Thurs 9am to 10am
- Chandless Thurs 2pm to 4pm

Please note: Cash counters close 30 minutes prior to the advertised times

Th **G t sh** **H us n** **C m ny**
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