# The Gateshead Housing Company Company

Spring 2017

## A royal visitor

See pages 4 - 5

Also in this issue...

- HomeRepairs update
- MyTGHCaccount launch
- Milestone purchase for Keelman Homes







Information is also available in large print, audio or Braille on request. Call 0191 433 5353 for more information. You can also fax to 0191 433 5354, email

enquiries@gatesheadhousing.co.uk or text 'ENQ' and your message to 0762 480 4167.	
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involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk -

#### Welcome

This time of year is all about new beginnings, and I'm sure you'll notice that this issue has a fresh new look.

The layout has also been revised to include a contents page (see below) and, at the back of the magazine, there's a handy reference section of all our contact information.

This year's Moving
Forward programme
of free courses
has also had a
revamp – why
not take a look

and see if there's anything in there for you.

Apart from that, it's business as usual, with updates on what's happening in the housing company, and news from all across Gateshead.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue – if you would like to receive future issues online rather than on paper, email us at communications@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Toul Dof

Paul Foy, Chair of the Board

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## A royal visitor

The housing company recently had a very special visitor – none other than Prince Harry!

The Prince visited Gateshead Civic Centre and met with our employees as part of his work with armed forces charity Walking With The Wounded.

Housing Services Manager Lisa Philliskirk and Senior Outreach Worker Mick Downworth spoke at the event about how the housing company's Armed Forces Outreach Service supports veterans.

The service helps ex-service personnel make the transition from military life to civilian life and also supports serving members of the Armed Forces and their families.





Prince Harry chatted with representatives from Walking With The Wounded and the local police to learn more about their work to help those veterans who are susceptible to mental health issues and being drawn into crime.

Walking With The Wounded supports those 'at risk' to sustain their independence once they have left military service, providing long-term security for the veterans and their families.

Mick Downworth said: "The royal visit was a great opportunity to talk about the help available to veterans.

"It's important that this support is available to ex-service personnel so they can lead a normal life after they leave the armed forces."

#### Want to know more?

To find out more about Armed Forces support visit http://www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/armed-forces-support/



### **HomeRepairs update**

We hope you enjoyed reading the HomeRepairs newsletter, which was delivered to all tenants in February.

The newsletter told you that, from 1 April 2017, the housing company's HomeRepairs service is the service provider for repairs to Gateshead's council homes.

This is a very exciting time, as we transfer around 400 employees who previously worked for Mears and Gateshead Council to the housing company.

Having everyone involved in the repairs process working for the same company will help us to provide an efficient customer-focused service that delivers value for money.

However, while we finish this service transfer there may be some delays in dealing with routine repairs. Thank you for your patience.

You can still report repairs in the usual way, and emergencies will be dealt with as normal.

#### Want to know more?

You can find an online version of *HomeRepairs Update* at our website: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/homerepairs-update-issued-to-all-customers/

#### Ways to report a repair

Customers will see very little change in the way we provide the service. You will report repairs in the same ways, to the same customer service team:



Online: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/repairfinder



Email: repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk



Text: 'REPAIR' and your message to 0762 480 4167



Call: 0800 408 6008

#### Senior management team



(l-r) Mick Moore, Michael Crinnion and Victoria Beattie.

In HomeRepairs Update we introduced Director of Property and Assets Victoria Beattie. Victoria is joined by Head of Capital Investment Mick Moore, Head of Commercial Services Michael Crinnion and Partnering Manager Mel Cole. The Senior Management team will be completed by the Head of Performance and Service Improvement (Property and Assets) - this role was still vacant at the time of going to press.

Victoria said, "For the last few months we've been preparing to transfer the repairs and housing imporvement services to the housing company. It's great that we're all now working together to provide a more efficient service for our customers."

#### A new look

Many of you will already have seen the new HomeRepairs vans out and about around the borough.

There's also a new uniform for our repairs staff, modelled here by some of the team.

Employees who visit your home will be wearing housing company ID badges.
Please remember to check a caller's ID before allowing them into your home.
If you are in any doubt you can call us on 0191 433 5353 to check if callers are genuine.



### **MyTGHCaccount** - register to win!

**MyTGHCaccount** is the new online service that lets you view your rent account and make payments at your convenience 24/7.

It's simple to use - all you need is access to the internet and a few minutes to register your details.

With MyTGHCaccount you can manage your rent and other housing company payments all in one place, giving you more control over your finances.

And if you register by 31 May you'll be entered into a prize draw to win one of three £50 gift cards.

## Getting started with MyTGHCaccount

Before you begin you will need your payment reference number (find this on your paper rent statement) and an email address.

Then follow the link on our website homepage (www.

gatesheadhousing.co.uk) and select 'Check your rent account'. Select 'I do not have an account yet (register)' to create an account - or simply log in if you have already used MyTGHCaccount. Always remember to keep your password safe and secure.

Currently you can check your rent account, but there are plans to expand the service to allow you to update your personal information, complete surveys, and book repairs. It's good news for leaseholders too, who will be able to use the service later this year.

Housing company tenant Sheila Bouitieh, who recently tested out the new service, said: "I do everything online so this is a welcome addition to the housing company's services. I can now keep track of my rent account whenever I want and am looking forward to seeing what new features will be added in the future."

#### Do you lack confidence with computers?

If you want to use "MyTGHCaccount" but don't have the online skills, why not sign up for our digital training?

See our Moving Forward course booklet or contact the Involvement Team at involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk or on 0191 433 5357.



#### Want to know more?

Email customerservices@gatesheadhousing.co.uk



## Keelman Homes makes milestone purchase

Social housing provider Keelman Homes has purchased its first non-ex-local-authority property through its 2015-2018 Empty Homes Programme.

The one-bedroom new-build property is situated on Whitewell Road on the former Bleach Green Estate in Blaydon.

The property, which has already been let, has an allocated parking space, UPVC windows, highefficiency boiler, central heating and carpets throughout.

All properties in the Empty Homes Programme are acquired by Keelman Homes, refurbished to a high standard, then let at affordable rates.

Keelman Homes has delivered 19 properties to date through the programme and has recently been awarded an additional grant from the Homes and





Communities Agency (HCA) for a further 20 homes.

The programme will bring approximately £2.8m of housing investment into Gateshead by March 2018, and provide a range of affordable-rent properties to people registered on the Housing Register.

Amanda Gallagher, Development and Investment Manager for Keelman Homes, said: "This property is in great condition and will make a lovely home. "It's wonderful to see the Empty Homes Programme making a positive difference in local communities."

To register to bid for homes visit www.tyneandwearhomes.org.uk or for further information about Keelman Homes visit www.keelmanhomes.org

### Let us help you save £££s!

Three of the big six energy suppliers have now announced price rises for their customers on standard variable tariffs and more suppliers are likely to follow.

If you're looking for a better deal on your gas and electricity, our Energy Advice Service can help you save money by comparing suppliers and helping you switch to a fixed plan. We can also offer energy efficiency advice and explain what to do if you're in debt with your fuel company.

Since December 2015 the service has saved tenants a total of £40,675. This is an average of £272.99 per customer.

Anyone who lives in Gateshead can get free advice – you don't have to be a housing company tenant.

To find out how we can help you call 0191 433 5800 or visit: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/energy-angels/



## Bensham residents learn life-saving skills

Residents at Bensham Court in Gateshead have started lifesaving CPR training.

The sheltered scheme received a free CPR training kit from the British Heart Foundation and residents were eager to learn how to use it.

The training sessions will give those who complete the training the skills and knowledge required to administer CPR in an emergency.

The British Heart Foundation is providing the free kits to community groups throughout the country, in an attempt to create a nation of life-savers.

Michelle Muldoon-Smith, Older Persons Housing Manager, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for residents at Bensham Court to learn these important skills. The training sessions are very informative and interactive, and a good way of getting people together to learn."

The Gateshead Housing Company, working in partnership with Gateshead Council, is committed to promoting this worthy cause and is enthusiastic to expand the CPR training throughout all of its sheltered housing schemes.

Jean Jones, Ellen Wilson and Doris Stafford were among the residents who enjoyed the training session at Bensham Court. Jean said: "The CPR training was extremely valuable and a great experience for the residents within Bensham Court. It gave us confidence to try CPR if we ever need to in the future.

"We are keen now to do more CPR sessions for others living in Bensham Court and the local community."



Residents from Bensham Court and employees from the housing company at the CPR training session.

#### **Interested in CPR training?**

Our Moving Forward programme of free courses includes sessions on CPR training. For more details take a look at the leaflet or contact the Involvement Team:

**Call:** 0191 433 5357

**Text:** 'INVOLVE' and your message to 0762 480 4167

**Email:** involve@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Web: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/involve

## Thinking of buying a mobility scooter?

Mobility scooters can make a real difference to people's lives, enabling them to live independently. But before buying a scooter, it's important to consider the size of it, the access into your property and the costs involved.

You will need to have written permission from the housing office to store and charge the scooter within your home.

The scooter must be able to fit through doorways, into lifts and be stored in your home as it can't be left in a communal area.



Mr Buxton who lives at St Cuthbert's Court uses a mobility scooter. He said: "Before buying a scooter I contacted my Estate Officer to discuss my requirements.

"I considered the size of the lifts and the doorway to my flat. The size of the scooter

I bought meant that others could use the lift at the same time. It was also important to be able to store and charge the scooter safely in my flat as I know the landings need to be kept clear."

To find out more about keeping a mobility scooter in your property contact your housing office.

#### Want to know more?

Visit our website to read our guidelines for mobility scooters: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/mobility-scooter-guidance

### Need help to get into work?

The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council are working together to help tenants find work by providing a free advice and guidance service.

More than 100 tenants have already benefitted from this support, which is designed to help anyone who is currently out of work, whatever their circumstances

Employment Adviser Melvyn Mallam-Churchill (pictured right), who has so far helped more than 40 tenants into work, said: "It has been so rewarding to work with people across Gateshead and see them progress.

"We offer a personalised service and support that is tailored to individual needs - I think that's what really makes the difference."

Gateshead Council continues to support people to help them find work - you can call them on 0191 490 9480 to find out how they can help you.



#### **Tenants can get help to:**

- Create CVs
- · Apply for jobs
- Use the internet to search for job vacancies
- Prepare for interviews
- Boost confidence and self-awareness
- Find jobs with local employers
- Upskill and improve Maths, English and ICT.



The 21st St Helen's Cub Pack taking part in The Great British Spring Clean.

## **The Great British Spring Clean**

Children in Gateshead have helped The Gateshead Housing Company to bin local litter problems.

The 21st St Helen's Cub Pack joined forces with employees from the housing company and Gateshead Council to make their local areas safer and cleaner.

Armed with bin bags and rubbish grabbers, the group took to the streets to clear up wrappers, boxes, cigarette butts and other litter.

The litter-pick took place in the Allerdene area of Gateshead, as part of The Great British Spring Clean.

The campaign aims to bring together people from across the country to clear up the litter that blights towns, villages, countryside and coastline.

Catherine Hopkins, Housing Manager, said: "It's great to see everyone getting involved, helping to clean up our local area. The Great British Spring Clean is a brilliant opportunity to get people together and make a difference.

"The housing company will be working with The Scout Association to store essential equipment and the litter pick fulfils one requirement of their World Challenge Badge."

To find out more about The Great British Spring Clean visit: www.greatbritishspringclean. org.uk/

### **New flats in Whickham**

The housing company has acquired 11 properties in Inner West Gateshead, in Whickham town centre.

The flats, at St Mary's Green, are in a block which has shops on the ground floor and residential accommodation above.

The building was constructed in the 1950s and forms part of a housing estate entirely made up of properties of a similar age.



The flats were acquired when Gateshead Council bought up the final part of Whickham shopping centre, giving them full ownership of it.

The council asked us to manage the properties and they are now part of our general housing stock. Ten of the flats already had tenants, all of whom have now signed tenancy agreements with us.

Housing Manager Brian Richardson said, "We're very glad to have more properties in the popular area of Whickham. These flats are of a high specification, so I'm sure they'll prove to be very desirable."

## UK Housing Awards – we're finalists!



The UK Housing Awards 2017 finalists have been announced – and we have been selected in the "Outstanding approach to income management" category.

The awards recognise the ingenuity, creativity, passion and results of housing organisations, and we've been shortlisted for the many support services we provide.

We recently presented our achievements to the awards panel - the winners will be announced at an awards ceremony on 26 April 2017.

### Some of the reasons we've been selected

As soon as a customer successfully bids for a property, we contact

them to find out if they need any financial advice. We can then offer them training sessions on budgeting and affordability.

If at any point a customer needs financial help, they can contact our Advice and Support Officers, who have received Citizen's Advice Bureau accredited training.

We also have an Energy Advice Service to help customers get the best deal on their gas and electricity and an Employment Adviser to support those who are looking for work.

We're even looking to the tenants of the future, working with local schoolchildren to teach them about budgeting.

#### Want to know more?

- Read more about our Energy Advice Service on page 11
- Read more about the Employment Advice Service on page 15
- Get in touch with an Advice and Support Officer at adviceandsupport@ gatesheadhousing.co.uk or on 0191 433 6161.

#### **Awards and achievements**





## A new look for West Gateshead bungalows

A scheme to improve the thermal insulation of eight bungalows at The Green in Highfield has recently been completed.

The homes were built in the 1940s as temporary accommodation to reduce the housing shortage following World War II. The "Tarran" bungalows have a pre-cast concrete frame that was factory built and transported to site for construction.

Although intended as temporary housing, Tarran bungalows have become permanent and popular accommodation due to their space and layout. Like many non-traditional property types, Tarran properties originally had a poor thermal value as they could not be traditionally insulated.



The bungalows were first modernised in the 1990s, when a range of internal and external improvements were done. However, a small amount of grant funding presented an opportunity to improve the properties further.

A scheme was developed to replace the roofs and windows and improve the external wall insulation. The work, carried out by Gateshead Council's Construction Services, has given the eight properties a complete facelift.

Tenants are delighted with the work, with one commenting, "The bungalow is a lot warmer and the outside looks great."



## **Grant for Birtley music group**

The Gateshead Housing Company has helped to fund a weekly music group for young people in South Gateshead.

A £4,400 grant has enabled Birtley Community Association to deliver the music group on Tuesday evenings for 11-19 year olds. The grant came from the housing company's Community Fund, which is held by the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

The music group is run by a combination of volunteers and qualified youth workers from North East Youth and attracts up to 30 participants each week.



#### Making a difference

Working primarily with youngsters from the social housing estates of Elisabethville and Portmeads, the group aims to engage with otherwise hard-to-reach young people who would benefit from youth worker interaction.

Carol Smith from Birtley
Community Association said:
"The Musical Youth programme is
making a huge difference to the
lives of young people who live in
this area of South Gateshead.

"By encouraging young people to interact through music, our youth workers and volunteers can reach out to those who will benefit from extra support."

Chris Hardy, Estate Officer at The Gateshead Housing Company said: "It's great to see young people benefitting from the Community Fund.



Youngsters from the Musical Youth group with Brenda Price, Chairperson of the Birtley Community Association and Chris Hardy, Estate Officer at The Gateshead Housing Company.

"The group is making a big difference to young people in Birtley and this funding will enable more young people to get involved in the music programme."

#### Want to know more?

Our website has information about our Community Fund and the type of projects it supports at: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/a-guide-to-our-community-fund/



## Funding for Gateshead youth club

The Gateshead Housing Company has helped a youth club in East Gateshead to continue supporting young people.

Leam Lane Youth Club, which received a £1,000 grant, is one of many community projects to receive funding from the housing company's Community Fund.

The club was set up in June 2015 to deliver programmes and activities to young people in Leam Lane and the surrounding areas. The sessions, which take place at Leam Lane Community Centre, aim to enhance personal and social development.

The grant will enable the project to continue for a further 20 weeks, helping to tackle current



#### Making a difference

issues and providing a safe space for local young people to have fun.

Mark Chambers from Leam Lane

"We are delighted we have received this funding which allows the club to continue delivering vital support to young people in Gateshead. The sessions help us to reach out to the young people who need us most."

Since 2006, the Community Fund has awarded cash and in-kind grants totalling over £500,000 to more than 120 groups across Gateshead.



Leam Lane Youth Club members enjoy a game of table football.

To find out more about Leam Lane Youth Club visit: www.leamlaneyouthclub.org.uk or email mark.chambers@leamlaneyouthclub.org.uk

You can read more about the fund, and apply online, at www.communityfoundation.org.uk/apply

#### Want to know more?

You can read more about the Community Fund, and apply online at: http://www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/a-guide-to-our-community-fund/



## Reducing isolation in older people

The Gateshead Housing Company's Community Fund has donated £4,927 to Age UK Gateshead to support people aged over 50 with mental health and financial challenges.

The Advocacy Support team will work with older people across Gateshead to encourage social interaction through individual advocacy and peer advocacy groups.

Age UK Gateshead provides a wide range of services and activities for older people to help reduce isolation, provide financial advice, promote independent living, and give access to wellbeing services.



Age UK Gateshead's Advocacy Support team with Jon Goodwin from the Community Foundation (back left) and Housing Manager Richard Finlow (back right).

To find out more about Age UK Gateshead's services call 0191 477 3559 or email admin@ageukgateshead.org.uk

### Dates for your diary

## Wednesday 19 April Staying Steady, Lobley Hill Community Centre, 11-11.30am.

A gentle exercise taster session organised by Gateshead Older People's Assembly.

#### Wednesday 19 April

Dancercise, Lobley Hill Community Centre, 12.30-1pm.

A taster session organised by Gateshead Older People's Assembly.

#### Wednesday 26 April

**VeraFlow, Deckham Village Hall, 11am-12noon**. A gentle yogastyle class organised by Gateshead Older People's Assembly.

#### Saturday 6 May

Spring Craft Fair, St Mary's Heritage Centre, starts 10:30am.

Homemade crafts and gifts, delicious home baking and hot refreshments.

£1 entry, includes a tea/coffee.

#### Wednesday 14 June

Party in the Park, Saltwell Park, 11am-2pm. Gateshead Carers' annual event to celebrate the 22,000 unpaid carers in our

#### Saturday 17 June

community.

Teams Festival, Redheugh Football Club ground, 11am-

**4pm.** A great family day out, with activities including: football tournament, stalls, bouncy castles and a climbing wall!

#### Saturday | July

**Dunston Festival, Dunston Park, 12-3pm.** An annual event with fun for all the family.

#### 21-23 July

Newcastle Pride, Town Moor. Saturday parade – this year's theme is Pride in our Past, Present & Future.

If there are any events coming up in your part of Gateshead that you'd like us to promote, email the Communications Team at communications@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

#### **HomeRepairs**

Report **non-emergency** repairs

**Web:** www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/repairfinder

Email: repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

**Text:** 'REPAIR' and your message to 0762 480 4167

Call: 0800 408 6008 Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm (and

until 6.30pm on a Monday).

Report **emergency repairs** on 0800 408 6008 at any time, seven days a week

#### **Your rent**

View your rent account status at any time by logging on to the "MyTGHCaccount" online service.

To create an account just follow the link on our website homepage **www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk** 

#### Easy ways to pay

- Direct Debit the simplest, safest way
- Pay online or get a balance at www.gateshead.gov.uk
- Debit or credit card call our automated 24-hour service on 0800 052 3455
- At any PayPoint outlet or Post Office using your rent payment card.
   Find your nearest outlet at www.paypoint.co.uk/paypointlocator

If you have any queries about your payments, or want advice about arranging to pay off arrears, contact your Rent and Income Team at rent@gatesheadhousing.co.uk or 0191 433 6150.

#### Finding a home

The Tyne and Wear Homes weekly bidding cycle opens at 00.01am each Thursday and closes at 11.59pm each Monday. To find out more ask at your housing office or contact the Lettings Team:

**Web:** www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/find-a-home-in-gateshead

**Email:** tyneandwearhomes@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

**Text:** 'CBL' and your message to 0762 480 4167

#### **Housing offices**

#### **1st floor, Gateshead Civic Centre (Central)**

Call: 0191 433 2730

Email: centraloffice@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

#### **Gateshead Council @ Birtley**

Call: 0191 433 6102

Email: birtleyoffice@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

#### **Gateshead Council @ Blaydon**

Call: 0191 433 6202

Email: blaydonoffice@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

#### Gateshead Council @ Leam Lane

Call: 0191 433 5888

Email: leamlaneoffice@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

#### **Wrekenton Hub**

Call: 0191 433 5822

Email: wrekentonoffice@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Find opening times, addresses and maps for all housing offices on our website at www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/your-housing-office/

## Earn while you learn! Are you aged 16 to 24?

Do you have or expect to get three GCSEs at Grade C or above (or equivalent qualification) including maths and English?

Then an apprenticeship with The Gateshead Housing Company could be for you.



#### Apprenticeships we offer include:

- **Business administration**
- Electrician
- Highways operative
- Plumber
- Motor vehicle fitter
- Bricklayer
- Heating and ventilation engineer

be the opportunity to achieve a successful and rewarding career in local government.

#### Want to know more?

Call: 0191 433 7354



Plasterer

Fabricator/welder







