

YOUR VOICE



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
PARTNERSHIP HOMES

Issue 26 | Autumn 2023

HOUSING NEWS FOR
TENANTS & LEASEHOLDERS

New standards for social landlords are on the way

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Welcome

to the autumn issue of Your Voice

This is my first edition as the new Chief Executive at NPH.

Although it's only been a few months since I was handed the reins, it's already clear to me that the organisation has achieved some great things in the eight years it's been managing housing services for West Northamptonshire Council (formerly Northampton Borough Council).

It's also clear how committed my colleagues are to listening to residents and driving up standards (see p15), so that we continually improve the housing services we provide.

However, we recognise there is still work to do and with changes to social housing regulation just around the corner (see p8 and 9), we're working hard to get things right first time – and if we don't, we'll do everything we can to listen, keep you informed of progress and do the right thing.



We'll keep investing in our existing homes (see p10) while building new ones (see p11), as part of our vision to provide homes that enable people to live happy and healthy lives in enriched communities.

There's lots more in this latest edition too, so sit back, relax and enjoy reading Your Voice.

Regards,

Steve Feast
Chief Executive



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PARTNERSHIP HOMES**

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Reader Friendly

NOTICE BOARD

PAY YOUR RENT BY DIRECT DEBIT

Did you know you can pay your rent by Direct Debit? It's simple to set up through Your NPH portal – you just need your tenancy reference number to hand to register and your bank account details for the Direct Debit instruction.

You can choose to set up your payment either every Friday or monthly on your choice of date between 1st to 28th of the month.

Find out more at www.nph.org.uk/pay-your-rent-direct-debit or scan the QR code below:



If you need help paying your rent, please call 0300 330 7003.

MUTUAL EXCHANGE

Find out more about swapping your home!



Apply today

It is easy to sign-up and start looking for your new home



Friendly advice

Our experienced home-swapping team are here to help



Processing your application

Once you have found a swap, we'll sort out the rest

Find out more

More information about mutual exchange is available here:

www.nph.org.uk/exchange-your-home

Have your say on how we do things Join our Resident Advisory Panel



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
PARTNERSHIP HOMES

NPH provides homes which enable people to live happy and healthy lives in enriched communities. To help us achieve this, we listen and respond, so we can continually improve our services that endeavour to meet the needs and aspirations of all NPH residents.

About the Resident Advisory Panel

Our Resident Advisory Panel brings the experience and values of tenants directly into the way that services are developed and delivered, helping us create better services and higher levels of resident satisfaction.

Meeting every three months either virtually or in person, the main role of the panel is to consider and feedback on customer-facing policies, performance and strategies through desktop reviews, consultation exercises and recommendations.

Become a member of the Resident Advisory Panel

This is a great opportunity to have your say on how we do things and help us make a real difference to the lives of NPH residents.

This is a voluntary position, although out-of-pocket expenses relating to attendance of the group, such as travel, will be reimbursed.

To find out more, get in touch with our Resident Involvement Team on **01604 837 836** or email getinvolved@nph.org.uk

Exercise classes that 'make a difference' at Lakeview

Residents at Lakeview House, which includes 45 independent, accessible council-owned apartments for older people, invited us along to their fortnightly exercise class.

The class is led by John, one of Lakeview's residents, who is a qualified fitness instructor. John has been teaching free fitness classes, in the communal area of the building, for 14 months. He is a big advocate for keeping active, especially as we get older.

John said: "Everyone knows exercise is important, but so often people say they don't have the time. If they really understood the impact it can have on their life, they would do it."

"I have seen people arrive at one of my classes using a walking aid, then gradually, with regular attendance, they don't need it anymore. It really can make a difference."

The class is a mixture of seated and standing exercises. John adapts the class according to each person's needs. During our visit, the class used handheld weighted balls to increase resistance whilst working out for example. It finished with a few dance steps and calming stretches.

There are many benefits to taking part in physical activities for people of all ages and abilities. However, it's a key contributing factor to maintaining independence in older adults.

In the past, resident Dianne enjoyed keeping fit, but after sustaining a back injury, she was wary of any physical activity. She recently decided to give John's class a try. She said: "John assured me that the class would be safe, so I tried it for the first time."

"I have been coming ever since. I really enjoy the class – it helps me keep active and I always feel invigorated afterwards."

John leads other classes around Northampton and there are other fitness classes held at various NPH Community Hubs. The classes are often free to attend, or with a small entry fee.

For more details or to find out what else is happening at an NPH Hub near you, please contact the Resident Involvement team on 01604 837 836 or email getinvolved@nph.org.uk



New scheme to help cut fuel poverty and tackle climate change

NPH is helping to fund a plan to harness renewable and wasted heat to tackle fuel poverty and make the Northampton area a more sustainable place.

West Northamptonshire Council has announced work on a Sustainable Heat Network Feasibility Study - with support from Ramboll and AECOM - to explore the possibility of a district heating system that can deliver lower-cost, low-carbon heat to homes and businesses.

District heating collects warmth from a variety of sources and uses a distribution system of insulated pipes to carry it from a central source to multiple buildings. It can significantly reduce heating costs and carbon emissions, compared with traditional heating sources.

WNC has secured £112,000 from round 12 of the Government's Heat Network Delivery Unit Funding. The project will also be match funded by contributions of £20,000 from NPH and £40,000 from the council's Public Health Team.

Once the feasibility study is complete, it will provide critical data on sustainable heat sources, technical and financial costs, and potential funding opportunities. Watch this space!



Home fire safety self-checker

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service have a great online tool that will help keep you and your household safe from fire.

The Home Fire Safety Self Checker takes 15 minutes to complete. At the end, you'll get a personalised fire safety action plan to download and print out.



The tool will take you through your home one room at a time and the simple questions will help you spot fire risks as you go around. It will then offer tips and advice on the steps you can take to reduce any risks.

It may suggest the fire service visit your property for a more in-depth fire safety chat with you. Find out more at www.ohfsc.co.uk.

Don't forget - NPH also carries out regular compliance checks including fire safety, electrical and gas safety. It's important that you let us complete these to help keep you safe. We'll be in touch when your next compliance check is due.

If you have any questions or concerns about fire safety in your home, please contact us on 0300 330 7003.

Update on damp, mould and condensation

Over the summer, we've been busy working with the Resident Scrutiny Panel to review how we manage damp, mould and condensation.

As a result, we'll be sharing more about our new processes ahead of the colder winter months, so keep an eye on our website and social media channels for updates, advice and guidance.

In the meantime, if you do need to report issues with damp, mould and condensation, please report them directly to us, rather than through other routes such as a legal disrepair claim. It will mean our budgets are spent on repairs, rather than legal fees.

What causes damp, mould and condensation?

Many of us will unfortunately experience damp in our homes at some point. These are some of the main causes of damp, mould and condensation in the home:

- Excess moisture
- Rain seeping in from damage to the roof
- Rain coming in from a damaged window
- Building defects
- Poor ventilation through the property
- If your home isn't getting enough heat

What you can do

There are some easy things you can do around your home to help try to prevent damp and mould. We recommend trying all of these things to actively prevent mould build-up:

- Always cook with lids on pans
- Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed and windows open
- Dry clothes outside on an airer
- Wash areas affected by mould
- Dry windows and windowsills
- Use your heating system to keep your home as warm as possible

Need to report damp and mould?

Get in touch with our team on **0300 330 7003** or report online at www.nph.org.uk/report-repair



Local MP has tour of Happy to Help services

We welcomed Andrew Lewer MP (Northampton South) to NPH in June, as part of a tour of some of the services offered through our social enterprise subsidiary Happy to Help.

Mr Lewer was invited to visit The Paint Shop at Kings Heath, where he met volunteer Jack and the team, to find out more about how we collect reusable, leftover paint and sell it to members of the community for a much-reduced price – and stop it going to landfill.

Then it was a short trip over to Briar Hill to meet resident Diane and our gardener Paul to find out more about our Gardening Service, which means there's someone trustworthy you can call who doesn't charge a fortune.

Find out more about Happy to Help's services at www.nph.org.uk



From left to right: Paint Shop volunteer Jack, NPH Head of Engagement Cam Whyld and Andrew Lewer MP



From left to right: NPH Resident Diane explained to Mr Lewer why she uses our Gardening Service

Women in Housing Awards finalist

Our Occupational Therapist Jean Merrilees was shortlisted for the 'Professional of the Year (Council/ALMO)' accolade at the Women in Housing Awards recently.

Jean, who manages our Adaptations Team, was one of six people in the running for this particular category at a ceremony held in Manchester in June.

While Jean didn't land the award on this occasion, being a WIH finalist after being shortlisted from hundreds of entries across the country is an amazing achievement.

The awards celebrate the leaders, innovators and changemakers from across the sector,

championing the successes of women and sharing learning from teams and individuals within the housing sector. Well done Jean!



Our Chief Executive Steve Feast congratulated Jean Merrilees at the WIH Awards

New standards for social landlords

A consultation has been launched into new standards for all social landlords, which aim to increase protection for tenants and improve homes and standards.

They're being introduced by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), which sets a range of standards that the sector needs to follow to help ensure homes are of an appropriate quality to meet the needs of residents.

It follows the introduction of a new Social Housing Act, which was given Royal Assent this summer and was brought in following the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

While we already need to comply with standards set by the regulator, these new requirements - due to be implemented in April 2024 - will be even stronger and will give tenants more power to hold West Northants Council, us and other social landlords to account.

What is being proposed?

The proposals include consumer standards that will:

- protect tenants by strengthening safety requirements that all social landlords need to meet
- require landlords to know more about the condition of tenants' homes and the individual needs of the people living in them
- make sure landlords listen to tenants' complaints and respond quickly when things need to be put right
- require landlords to be open and accountable to tenants, and treat them with fairness and respect



New standards for social landlords are set to be introduced next April

It's part of a major, positive change to social housing regulation and will include regular inspections of landlords from next year to help assess whether they meet the new requirements.

As a responsible organisation that puts tenants at the heart of our decision-making, NPH welcomes further strengthening of standards set by the regulator.

Consultation launched

The consultation by the RSH is for landlords, tenants and anyone with an interest in social housing. It runs until 17th October 2023 and people are invited to have their say via RSH's website.

Our Resident Involvement Team will be running a feedback session to hear your views. Keep an eye on our social media channels for details.

What we're doing to prepare for the changes

Introducing quarterly surveys (Tenant Satisfaction Measures)

Earlier this year, new Housing Regulatory Standards came in called Tenant Satisfaction Measures. They're designed to check how well landlords are doing at keeping properties in good shape and to help you hold us to account.

These measures are part of a big shake-up of social housing regulations with a more tenant-focused system.

We're managing homes on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council, who are the registered social housing landlord, and it's a regulatory requirement to collect and report on these measures.

We'll do this through quarterly surveys, starting this October, which will ask you questions around seven main themes:

1. Overall satisfaction with the service we've provided
2. Keeping properties in good repair
3. Maintaining building safety
4. Safety checks
5. Effective handling of complaints

6. Respectful and helpful engagement with tenants

7. Responsible neighbourhood management

We've commissioned Acuity to carry out these surveys on our behalf. Acuity have been providing consultancy services to the social housing sector for over 25 years.

They'll contact a random sample of residents each quarter to ask what you think about your home and the services we provide.

The responses received will help us highlight any areas for improvement. The survey is strictly confidential and anonymous, and we'll only see overall results.

If you're contacted to take part, it'll usually be by phone between 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday and between 10am and 6pm on a Saturday. No calls are made on a Sunday.

The phone will ring for a minimum of 25 seconds or until a voice mail kicks in. This ensures residents living with mobility issues are given sufficient time to get to the phone.

You can find out more about this survey and acuity on our website at www.nph.org.uk

Stock condition checks

We work hard to ensure your home continues to meet the Decent Homes Standard and one of the ways we do this is through regular stock condition surveys.

It also helps ensure we understand the individual needs of the people living there, also part of the proposed consumer standards.

Letters will be sent to NPH residents from September onwards with more details about the survey and what it'll involve, but it basically helps us identify any work required to replace components passed their life expectancy.

Contractors working on our behalf will check things like kitchens, bathrooms and loft insulation, as well as doors, windows, fascia's and guttering, for example.

It's really important that we are able to complete this survey, so we can plan for any future improvements that might need to be carried out on your home. Keep an eye out for the letter landing shortly.

We'll share further updates in Your Voice and on our website, so watch this space.

Investing in our neighbourhoods

We continue to work hard to make improvements to homes in West Northamptonshire while finding opportunities to create more homes from existing spaces.

Here's a few examples of the work we've carried out in recent months.

Riverside House, Northampton

This former office block has completely transformed with 60 new flats now finished as part of phase one and more residents starting to move in.

We're starting the second stage of this development, adding another 12 apartments on the ground floor - we'll share more shortly.



Ten new apartments have been added to Dover Court (pictured), as well as Woodstock

Dover Court and Woodstock, Northampton

A total of 20 new apartments have been added to Dover Court and Woodstock (10 each), as part of a rooftop extension.

The homes have now been completed and are set to welcome new residents shortly.

We've also upgraded existing parts of the buildings including the installation of a new energy efficient communal boiler, external improvement works and upgraded fire safety features.

More new homes for West Northants...

It's been a busy summer as we continue to build more quality new homes for NPH residents across West Northamptonshire. Here's another quick update about some of our current projects.

Former garage sites

We're busy turning some of our former garage sites around Northampton into brand new homes. By redeveloping this disused space, we're also helping to enhance the local surroundings in the heart of our communities.

Swale Drive, Northampton

Here's an example of some of the new homes we've built on former garage sites in Kings Heath recently, which are already welcoming their new families.

Stanley Road, Northampton

We've just been granted planning permission to build three new houses on a former garage site in Stanley Road with associated car parking, set to be completed later next year.

Montague Crescent, Northampton

Planning permission has also recently been granted for eight new homes including three two-bedroom bungalows, three three-bedroom houses and two four-bedroom houses, along with associated parking. We'll share more details soon.



Castle Street, Northampton

The first phase of our development at Castle Street is well underway.

Foundations are in place and blockwork is rising out of the ground for the 24 new homes for families in the Spring Boroughs areas of the town.

It's anticipated that residents will be able to start moving into the new homes, owned by West Northamptonshire Council, in late Spring 2024.

New South Bridge Road, Northampton

The construction of 28 brand new one and two-bedroom council-owned apartments on New South Bridge Road is moving at a pace.

Local contractors Steele and Bray are currently working on the first floor of the apartment buildings.

Great progress is being made and we'll share more updates on our social media channels.

Taking care
of your gas
appliances helps
keep you and
your loved
ones safe

Gas Safety Week:

raising awareness to help keep you safe

Gas Safety Week (11th to 17th September) is an annual event to raise awareness of gas safety and the importance of taking care of your gas appliances, co-ordinated by the Gas Safe Register.

Badly fitted and poorly serviced gas appliances can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions, and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO is a highly poisonous gas that can kill quickly and without warning – you cannot see it, taste it or smell it.

By taking care of your gas appliances - and allowing us to complete our regular checks when we need to - you are taking care of your home, your loved ones and looking out for your local community. There's a few simple checks to help keep you and others safe:

- **Check your landlord's Gas Safety Record:** by law, your landlord must keep gas pipework, appliances and flues supplied for you to use in good condition. They must arrange a gas safety check. Please help us protect you and your family by allowing us access for your vital annual gas safety check
- **Look out for any warning signs from your gas appliances:** if you've spotted any dark staining or sooty marks around your appliance, excessive condensation indoors or pilot lights that frequently go out, it may be

unsafe. Contact your landlord or, if you own the appliance, a Gas Safe registered engineer to check it

- **Know the six main symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning:** headaches, dizziness, breathlessness, nausea, collapse and loss of consciousness
- **Install an audible carbon monoxide alarm** – please make us aware if your CO detector is missing or not working
- **Get your own gas appliances safety checked annually:** your landlord is not responsible for gas appliances you own, so you should arrange for these to be safety checked once a year and serviced regularly by a Gas Safe registered engineer
- **Check your engineer is qualified for the type of gas work you need doing** e.g. natural gas, domestic boiler: You can find this information on the back of their Gas Safe ID card and at the Gas Safe Register website

For gas safety advice and to find or check an engineer, visit the Gas Safe Register website at www.gassaferegister.co.uk

To report a repair, please contact us on 0300 330 7003.

New app makes it easier to report nuisance noise

We're trialling an app that will make it easier for residents to report and evidence nuisance noise.

The Noise App is free to download to your mobile phone and allows users to record any instances of noise nuisance, which can be submitted safely and securely to NPH, alongside information about the incident that can be reviewed and used in an anti-social behaviour (ASB) case. The trial will initially be for 12 months and, if successful, will be continued.

Noise nuisance has been the most reported ASB issue to us in recent years:

- **April 2022 to March 2023** – 47% of ASB complaints were about noise
- **April 2021 to March 2022** – 52% of ASB complaints were about noise
- **April 2020 to March 2021** – 46% of ASB complaints were about noise

Our Tenancy Compliance Manager Ryan Surridge said: *“Currently, we have to install noise monitoring equipment at the address of the person who has reported noise nuisance to be able to evidence any incidents.*

“It relies on the equipment being installed at the right time and can be frustrating for those reporting it, if issues happen after the equipment has been removed. There is sometimes a waiting list for the equipment too, which can slow the evidence collecting process down.

“By using the Noise App, available to download instantly, it removes those potential barriers, making it easier to report noise nuisance and

means we can act sooner to tackle this type of anti-social behaviour.”

Our usual noise monitoring equipment is still available however, for any residents who'd prefer to use it or don't have access to a smart phone.

The trial follows a recent consultation with West Northamptonshire Council's Environmental Protection Team to enhance partnership working that will improve residents' experience when reporting noise nuisance.

It'll also prevent duplication of reports and, where appropriate, allow an easier use of powers available to the local authority if the EPT becomes involved with an NPH case.

Find out more about anti-social behaviour and how to report it on our website at www.nph.org.uk/anti-social-behaviour



If you wish to use the Noise App, speak to the Tenancy Compliance Team first on 0300 330 7003

'Feed me'

recycling competition a roaring success

A school competition to help raise awareness of the importance of recycling has been a 'roaring success'.

We partnered with Spring Lane Primary and Veolia to invite year four to six pupils from the school to come up with a colourful design for a friendly monster that will be attached to the front of communal bins at St Peters House on Little Cross Street.

It's part of our 'Feed Me Recycling Project' pilot, which aims to educate and encourage children to get involved with recycling from an early age. At the same time, it helps make separating plastics, paper, cardboard and other recyclables into the correct bin a fun experience.

We received almost 200 entries from the school with prizes available for the top three designs – one for each year including an overall winner, whose monster will appear on selected communal bins on the estate.

Heather Brown, Upper Phase Lead at Spring Lane Primary School, said: *"We were lucky enough to be approached by NPH and Veolia to take part in their colouring competition to promote recycling in the local area as many residents close to our school struggle to do so.*

"The children were really excited by the opportunity - we completed 180 entries from years 4, 5 and 6 which were narrowed down to three lucky winners and one overall winner from Year 5.

"The children found the talks provided by Veolia to be interesting and educational



Overall winner Elouise (front) with (back l-r) Heather Brown, Upper Phase Lead, Spring Lane Primary ; and Claire Clark, Engagement Manager, NPH

and were keen to share their new learning with their families."

A panel of judges – including our Chief Executive Steve Feast and Chair of the Board Andrew Woods – poured over the entries to choose the winners, who were Liliana (year 4) and Rokas (year 6), as well as year 5 and overall winner Elouise.

Elouise's entry has now been installed onto the bins at St Peters House and residents living there have also received a green recycling bag from NPH to help make it easier to sort and transport their waste before it goes into the appropriate communal bin.

Congratulations to everyone involved!

Five NPH colleagues celebrate 165-year career between them

Five NPH colleagues have celebrated a fantastic career milestone this summer.

Trudy Bulford (Housing Support Officer), Collin Gardner (Quantity Surveyor), Lee Hillery (Multi-task Painter) and Nicky McKenzie (Director of Housing) have worked in Northamptonshire's housing services for over 35 years each.

It included almost three decades with the council and more recently with NPH after we became an Arms-Length Management Organisation, owned by West Northamptonshire Council (formerly Northampton Borough Council).

While Jacqui Walsh, a Voids Control Officer, recently marked 25 years of helping residents with their housing needs across the town.

They were presented with a certificate and anniversary gift to mark decades of dedication to the sector during special celebrations.

Our Chief Executive Steve Feast shared his thoughts about the milestones: *"Dedicating decades to an organisation, its staff and residents is an incredible achievement."*

"What is even more remarkable, is that five colleagues are celebrating such an occasion at the same time – and that's the first time in my career I've been able to say that!"

"Although I've only been here a matter of months, it's clear that Trudy, Collin, Lee, Nicky and Jacqui are passionate about the work they do and are committed to doing the right thing for the people they're supporting – that is also true about all of our colleagues."

"So I'd like to take this opportunity again to express my deepest thanks and appreciation for the work that they done – here's to many more!"



(from l to r) Nicky McKenzie, Collin Gardner, CEO Steve Feast, and Trudy Bulford



Lee Hillery (middle) is presented with a certificate during celebrations with his team



Director of Housing Nicky McKenzie presents Jacqui Walsh (right) with her certificate



Autumn Wordsearch

There's an autumn theme to our wordsearch.
Can you find all 10 words?



| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | U | T | U | M | N | K | M | S | F | O | A |
| E | J | R | P | H | A | R | V | E | S | T | W |
| Q | G | A | T | F | O | N | C | P | R | M | G |
| B | Y | I | C | F | B | J | M | T | Z | L | P |
| H | K | N | L | A | R | W | X | E | Q | X | U |
| A | P | C | Z | D | E | Q | A | M | U | K | M |
| L | G | O | A | X | E | V | H | B | F | L | P |
| L | Q | A | Y | I | Z | G | P | E | C | N | K |
| O | I | T | B | D | Y | S | X | R | J | V | I |
| W | T | Y | H | H | C | M | E | V | N | Q | N |
| E | Q | F | I | R | E | W | O | R | K | S | J |
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| W | S | L | K | L | E | A | V | E | S | D | I |
| B | O | C | T | O | B | E | R | T | V | R | C |

- Autumn
- Breezy
- Fireworks
- Halloween
- Harvest
- Leaves
- Pumpkin
- Raincoat
- September
- October

We'll share the answers on our Facebook page, **NPH Connect**, shortly.

