

Tenants' NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER OF



Issue 09

Spring 2010

For Riverside tenants in the Carlisle area



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Riverside praised in report

Riverside has been hailed as beacon of best practice in a government report for its part in the £8.4 million regeneration of Carlisle.

The Audit Commission, the organisation that inspects public services, has identified Riverside's investment as something from which other housing providers could learn. The report highlights the success of Riverside's Revitalisation Fund, which invests £400,000 each year into the community.

Riverside's Regeneration and Partnership Manager Anne Quilter said: "We are pleased that the Audit Commission has recognised the difference that we are making to the local community and the particular credit that they have given our efforts in attracting match funding to raise additional funding which has seen, since 2002, about 84 community projects receive a total of £8.4 million."

Minister visits Carlisle



Housing Minister John Healey met with Riverside staff to find out how we are working to help provide homes for local people.

He visited Barratt Homes' Eden Park Development, on London Road, where Riverside oversees the government's HomeBuy Direct scheme.

Mr Healy then visited the rejuvenated Botcherby neighbourhood, ending at Riverside's newly renovated sheltered unit Freshfield Court, pictured.

Riverside has been awarded

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2009
OF THE YEAR

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Make a difference

Are you unhappy in your neighbourhood? Do you think no one listens? Do you want to make a difference?

We have vacancies on tenants' groups that tackle issues like anti-social behaviour, repairs and the condition of the estates where you live.

You don't need any qualifications but must be friendly, approachable and a team player. We are particularly interested in hearing from people aged between 16 and 36 years but anyone is welcome to apply. Training is provided and expenses are paid.

For more information contact Deborah Earl or Sean Crossley on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020.

Have your say on our services

Riverside is asking tenants to tell us what they think of our services.

Over the next few months, we are sending out a survey to a selection of customers so we can find out what we do well and where we need to improve. This survey is different to the follow up calls or feedback forms that you may have had in the past after receiving a repair or starting your tenancy with Riverside.

If you receive this survey, make sure you fill it in and have your say - and you could win up to £100 in gift vouchers!

Knowing our customers

In the next few months all Riverside customers in Carlisle will receive a detailed survey to complete, to help improve services.

What kind of information will Riverside ask for?

The survey will include some questions that may appear personal but we can reassure you that any information you provide will be kept confidential. You do not have to answer all the questions, but the more information you give us, the better service we can provide.



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The questions will cover categories such as ethnicity, disability, religion, gender and sexual orientation and we will also be asking questions about your household type. For us to provide the best possible service to you it is important that we understand your housing requirements.

How will Riverside use my information?

The information will mean:

- we can better plan future improvements to your property
- with can deal with your enquiries quicker and more efficiently
- we can deliver our services in a more cost-effective way, meaning more of our tenants' money is reinvested into services and neighbourhoods.

All completed and returned surveys will be entered into a prize draw and the winner will be announced later in the year.

Please note, this survey is different from the group-wide one which is also mentioned on this page.

Thinking about sheltered accommodation?

Are you thinking about sheltered housing for you or a loved one?

Riverside has six sheltered housing schemes in Carlisle, Dalston and Longtown offering accommodation supported by a warden service where

older people can live independently. Each home is equipped with a Careline community alarm system which can be pulled at any time of the day or night if a tenant requires assistance.

Our schemes put on activities each week and all schemes are close to local amenities and public transport routes. Tenants say they feel safer as they live in a community but their involvement can be at whatever level they choose.

For more information on Riverside's sheltered housing, contact Maureen Clifford on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020.



The communal lounge at Freshfield Court

Freshfield Court

Freshfield Court is our newly refurbished scheme in Botcherby. It has one bedroom accommodation in a scheme of 37 units, with facilities including a free laundry, an activity room, and a communal lounge and kitchen.

The scheme was completed in March 2010 and decoration is to a very high standard, with the look of a boutique hotel to break away from the traditional decor of sheltered housing.

Your responsibility

As part of your tenancy agreement, you are responsible for any damage to your property resulting from a deliberate act, negligence, misuse or accident.

If you ask Riverside to carry out a repair like this at your home, you will be asked to pay for it in advance. For example, if we have to replace a broken window you will have to pay up to £140 and if you ask us to unblock your drain, this will cost you £18.

If the repair is as a result of a crime being committed, you will not be charged but we

will want you to provide us with a police crime reference number.

You should report your repair in the normal way and you will be advised how much the repair will cost and if it is non-urgent, you will be given the chance to repair it yourself. However, in emergency situations, we will ensure that we immediately remove the source of any danger and bill you for the work carried out.

For more information contact the 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 111 0000 or on Tel: 0345 111 0000.

Fire safety review

Riverside has been upgrading its fire safety features in communal areas, following a review.

In February all residents living in flats with communal areas should have received some information about the upgrade in the post.

The upgrades include:

- door replacements
- fire alarm systems
- emergency lighting
- loft spaces.

The information sent out also included fire notices. We would urge residents who have received these to ensure that they are visible in their home so that visitors have information about the evacuation procedure in the event of a fire. Riverside is also putting up fire evacuation notices in communal areas as well as new fire exit and no smoking signs.



Laura Cadman explains the details of the communal area upgrades

Innovation Co-ordinator Laura Cadman said: "The safety of our residents is of paramount importance to Riverside and we encourage people to be vigilant with regard to fire safety. Please help to keep yourselves, your family and your neighbours safe."

A foot on t

Do you want to get your foot on the first rung of the property ladder? Riverside can help you on your way.

Riverside is the government's HomeBuy Agent for Cumbria, helping social housing tenants, eligible key workers and first-time buyers purchase a share of a home. There are two HomeBuy products available, designed to make buying a home more affordable.

HomeBuy Direct

With HomeBuy Direct you can buy a new property from a developer taking part in the scheme with the help of an 'equity loan'.

Buyers will receive an equity loan of between 15% and 30% of the property value, jointly funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the developer.

There is no interest to pay on the loan for the first five years. After that, an annual charge of 1.75% of the loan amount will be payable, on a monthly basis. The annual charge is then reviewed each year, and will rise in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 1%.

Riverside is responsible for assessing your application and for the administration of the HCA part of the initial loan.

New Build HomeBuy

New Build Homebuy allows you to buy a share of a new home built by a housing association or other provider that receives grant from the government. You buy a share in a property, usually a minimum of 25%, and pay a monthly rent on the remainder.

Teams improve nei

Riverside has drafted in two new teams to help improve the lives of tenants in Carlisle.

We have been awarded £370,000 to appoint a Neighbourhood Warden Service and an Environmental Clean Team, as part of a new Your Place project being rolled out across Riverside.

The Neighbourhood Wardens Service, already a familiar sight in Riverside's Merseyside neighbourhoods, will launch in May. Where they are already established, the Wardens have become friends of the community, patrolling the streets, solving

he ladder



You normally have the option to buy the remaining shares at a later date, eventually owning your home completely.

For more information on properties available in Cumbria under the HomeBuy scheme, and to apply, please visit, www.riverside.org.uk/riverside/cumbriahomebuy

New homes

Riverside has a selection of shared ownership properties on a new Persimmon Homes development Linton Grove, off London Road, Carlisle from just £33,250 for a 25% share.

For more information call on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020. Alternatively visit Website: www.riversidehomeownership.org.uk or Email: sales@riverside.org.uk

ighbourhoods

problems and helping vulnerable tenants. They have also improved community relationships, reduced crime and forged strong partnerships with local schools, businesses and other landlords.

The Clean Team will carry out a broad range of tasks from removing litter and fly-tipping to tree surgery, weed spraying and landscaping. They will target grot spots, remove graffiti, revitalise open spaces and work to brighten up our estates. The team will work in partnership with both local and county councils, and Riverside's contractors, ISS Waterers.

Tenants' top 10

At Riverside, we have many different ways of checking and reporting how well we deliver services to you.

For example, we may contact you to ask about the quality of a repair or we may measure how long it takes us to reply to letters and phone calls. We set targets to measure these things and help us improve.

We want to make sure that these targets focus on the services that you – our tenants - think are the most important.

Following discussions with Riverside's Tenants' Federation Service Quality Group we recently wrote to you, asking you what matters most. In total, 700 tenants responded and, from the replies we have drawn up a Tenants' Top 10 of the things you have said you want us to measure and report on.

They are:

- keeping repairs appointments
- keeping properties safe through gas safety checks
- satisfaction with overall service
- satisfaction with repairs
- satisfaction with our handling of anti-social behaviour
- satisfaction with most recent contact or service
- value for money of service charges
- responding to your letter within 10 days
- repairs completed right first time
- aids and adaptations completed when agreed.

We are now looking at the best ways to feed back the results of the Tenants' Top 10, so look out for updates in future editions of Tenants' Newsletter.

Meet the staff

Kristian Jordan is a Joiner in our Safe as Houses team

What do you most enjoy about your job?

Meeting and working with new people and giving people better homes.

What is your biggest work related achievement so far?

Getting my position at Riverside.

What would be your one desert island item and why?

My iPod, to keep me company. Plus, I can't sing so would rather listen to someone else.

What is your favourite book or film and why?

Seven Pounds - I think it's put together so well and Will Smith is one of the best actors in the world.

Who would play you in a film about your life and why?

Tom Cruise – he's short and dark haired like myself. Plus he's a legend.



A choice for Cumbria

Riverside is changing the way it lets its properties.

We are working with six district authorities and seven other housing organisations to develop a Cumbria-wide Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme to give more choice to those looking for rented housing.

Studies have shown that CBL schemes, where prospective tenants put their name forward for specific properties in which they are interested, is a more efficient way of letting property.

At the moment, customers have to register with each housing organisation separately and then either register their interest in properties with each landlord or wait for an offer to be made.

Under the new system, called Cumbria Choice, which is due to come into force at the end of 2010, customers will only need to complete one application form to register.

For more information call on Tel: 0800 169 3245.

News in brief

- Some tenants have reported problems with sealed bathroom light fittings. Investigations have revealed that this is because the maximum wattage of the bulbs being fitted is higher than the manufacturers recommendations. All light fittings should have a label inside stating the maximum wattage that the fitting is designed for - do not exceed this maximum.

- Figures released by Carlisle City Council in February showed that nearly 60 dog owners were fined over the previous year for not picking up after their pets. These figures reflect feedback we have received from tenants who say that dog fouling is a concern for them.

Carlisle City Council is responsible for enforcing dog fouling laws and is able to issue fixed penalty fines of up to £75. Some cases have even resulted in court proceedings where more than £900 has been collected in magistrate's fines.

- Do you want to find out how well Riverside is performing against other landlords in your area? Now, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the regulator for social housing in England, has launched a 'find and compare landlords' function on its website. This tool allows tenants to enter their postcode and compare things like the average rents, tenant satisfaction, involvement opportunities and repairs. The data is drawn from information supplied by landlords to the TSA as a legal requirement. The 'find and compare' function can be found at Website: www.tenantservicesauthority.org

Net your own home

Riverside Home Ownership has launched a new website to make it even easier for first-time buyers to get onto the property ladder.

Would-be buyers can search available properties, and set up e-mail alerts if they can't find what they are looking for on their first visit. To find out more visit www.riversidehomeownership.org.uk

Let us know

If you are unable to keep an appointment, it is vital you let us know so we can offer the slot to another tenant and avoid our wasting money on unnecessary home visits.

Riverside is called out to more than 20,000 repairs each year, but in the last 12 months operatives were unable to gain access for 1,276 visits. This cost the Carlisle office of Riverside about £25,000.

Riverside works hard to improve services for our customers and save money, so that we can use it in those areas you've told us are your priorities.

Please help us by:

- making a note of your appointment time
- letting us know as soon as possible if the appointment is no longer suitable.

You can contact our Customer Service Centre 24 hours a day on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020.

Safety first

Riverside is responsible for carrying out an annual service and safety check in all our properties that have a gas supply.

This service is free and is designed to keep you safe, but we still have some tenants who refuse to allow us access to carry out this important work.

We are updating our gas servicing procedure and would like to know what you think we could do to improve it.

- How can we encourage tenants to allow us access?
- Why we don't get access to some properties?
- Do our gas servicing letters and leaflets give you enough information? If no, what's missing?
- Did you know that you must allow us access as part of your tenancy agreement?
- Are the dangers and legal responsibilities highlighted enough?
- Is it clear when your appointment is?

All you need to do is write down your thoughts and ideas on improving gas servicing on a piece of paper and return it to us at: Freepost Plus RLUC-ASXE-BKUB, Riverside, Policy and Information, 2 Estuary Boulevard, Liverpool, L24 8RF. No stamp needed.

Brainteaser

Fancy cooking up a tasty treat this weekend? Try our food-related wordsearch to get your tastebuds tingling. Hidden within the grid are 10 words but can you find them all? The words are:

Baking Oven Chocolate Roast dinner Apron
Vegetables Dessert Fridge Fresh food Cookery

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

Forward together

Riverside has amalgamated with its sheltered and supported specialist ECHG, after tenants gave plans the green light.

This is the second stage of a process started last April when other areas of the organisation joined together to cut down on legal red tape and allow us to invest more money in frontline services.

After overwhelming support from 90% of tenants across Riverside and ECHG who responded to our consultation, and backing from the relevant authorities, the amalgamation went ahead on March 31 2010.

From April 1, ECHG became known as Riverside ECHG and has a new logo.

Tenants should not notice any changes to the service we provide.

If you receive housing benefit, this should continue as usual. We have written to all the housing benefit offices to tell them about these changes. If they contact you about it, please show them the letter called 'Notice of landlord details' posted to all tenants in April 2010. If you need more help, please call the Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020.

At your service



Our handyperson service can help you

Riverside is working with Carlisle City Council and Eden District Council to provide handyperson services to elderly and vulnerable homeowners throughout North Cumbria.

The service aims to help people with small repairs and maintenance in their homes and gardens, such as fitting shelves, unblocking sinks and putting up curtain rails.

All staff are fully trained and experienced and the service will only cost those who qualify £10 an hour for labour as it heavily subsidised by Carlisle City Council and Eden District Council. Any parts or materials will cost extra.

For more information on the scheme, contact Riverside Regeneration Officer Tracy Andrew on Tel: 0800 169 3245 or on Tel: 0345 155 9020.

If you require this magazine in another format e.g. large print or audio cassette or in another language, please telephone ☎ to **0800 169 3245 or 0345 155 9020.**

অনুবাদের জন্য আমাদের টেলিফোন করুন।

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