

The tenant newsletter from Acis Group
Keeping you informed

In this issue

Firecracker goes with a bang
Our Annual Review 2014/2015
Energy switching workshops -
be an #energyexpert



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Welcome to our winter edition of home news.

As winter draws in, and Christmas fast approaches, I often find myself looking back over the year to reflect on what has been achieved – both personally and at Acis. Have I fulfilled my new year's resolutions? Have we supported our customers the best we can? This year is no exception. You can read a snapshot about what we've done over the last year on page 7 – with even more stories online.

And this year, looking back is even more special as this edition of home news will be my last as chief executive of Acis. After 16 years with the organisation, I am moving on in the New Year to take up the post of chief executive with Linkage Community Trust, a charity whose cause is as close to my heart as Acis has been. When I joined Acis it was just 16 weeks old, determined to deliver its promises to its tenants in West Lindsey. What I'm leaving is an organisation that is not only great, but one that strives to be better every day – one that strives to ensure customers are supported – with much more than just their homes and one that tries

hard, every day, to ensure that we make a positive impact in the communities in which we work to create opportunities for people to have better lives. Just look at the first few pages of the magazine to see all the great things that are happening right now!

I know I am leaving an organisation that has done lots of great things during my time here:

- delivering its transfer promises to tenants,
- ensuring that all homes meet the decent homes standard,
- built over 2,000 new homes for people who need them,
- regenerated the Lower Manor and Woodthorpe estates, and
- created commercial ventures to make profits to reinvest.

And I know it will continue to do great work – some of which is highlighted in this issue including the introduction of our tenancy support officers (page 5), the great opportunities to get involved in through our TLSP (page 11), and the opportunities you have access to through our partnerships (page 6).

Finally I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all our customers, staff and partners for working together to improve people's lives and wish you all every success for the future.

Valais Webb

News round up

£5m affordable housing scheme finished

A vacant area near Chesterfield has been transformed into 61 new affordable homes.

After an initial £5m investment by us, we've taken delivery of the houses following their construction by Westleigh. And new tenants have been moving in over the last few months.

A variety of properties are available for affordable rent, including a number of one and two bedroom apartments, two-bedroom houses, two-bedroom level access bungalows and many three and four bedroom houses. Six of the houses are also available through a shared ownership scheme. All properties will be managed by us and be offered to people nominated from the North East Derbyshire District Council's ChoiceMove housing register.

As well as our investment, further funding was also provided by the Homes and Communities Agency. The development has been designed as a fantastic mix of house types to suit a variety of needs, including helping first time



Paul Wisher, head of business development at Acis Group with Gary Turner, head of investments and partnerships at Westleigh and Betty Hill, deputy leader at North East Derbyshire District Council.

buyers and young families get their first step onto the housing ladder.

Paul Wisher, our head of business development, said: "We are delighted to be providing a wide range of quality new homes for local people. This is a significant investment by us in North East Derbyshire, which has made a very positive contribution to the regeneration of the area and will enable us to continue to have a positive impact on the communities we serve."

Community Centre revamp in process

The Park Springs Community Centre in Gainsborough is closed until January as it undergoes its £90,000 revamp. As well as giving it a much-needed sprucing-up, our refurbishment will result in a new outdoor facility for our customers to use as well as new equipment to be used inside and outside. Look out for the new-look centre in January on our Facebook page!



Rent to reduce by 1%

Great news! All of our tenants will see their rent reduced by 1% a year for the next four years. The changes will come into effect in April next year. You'll find out about it in more detail in the next edition and in your annual rent information charge letter.



Firecracker 2015 goes with a bang

Our innovative project in Gainsborough has been hailed as a success after its sixth year.

The Firecracker initiative, which ran on Fridays in October and November, is designed to provide young people aged 11-16 with activities during the times around Hallowe'en, so-called Mischievous Night and Guy Fawkes' Night. This year's event has been funded by Dulverton Trust.

The month-long series of Friday night activities included games, nail art, t-shirt design, sweet making, cake decorating and logo design. Youngsters also got a themed hot meal each night – Indian, Chinese, Italian and American!

Held at the Park Spring Community Centre, the sessions were also supported by Lincolnshire Police, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue and West Lindsey District Council.

Claire Glasby, Acis community safety manager, said: "Over the last six years we've made a real difference to the local area – the young people have started to look forward to Firecracker around that time of year and local residents are benefiting from quieter streets."

Gainsborough police inspector Simon Outen said: "Lincolnshire Police is very pleased to be able to support Firecracker. It was set up a number of years ago to tackle rising youth antisocial behaviour around the period leading up to Hallowe'en, which was causing concern to the local community and Acis tenants."

"As a result of the work undertaken, the initiative has continued annually, and consequently a drop off in reported complaints has continued. The work itself ensures that the people who attend become involved in a variety of different activities, and has helped ensure that they are proactively engaged rather than being tempted to become involved in antisocial behaviour."

"This has been of benefit not only to those youngsters who engage in the available opportunities, but also to the wider community, and Lincolnshire Police will continue to support and participate in this event."



New chairman appointed

We have officially appointed a new chairman. Kelly Smith has replaced outgoing chairman Rod Must, who has served his full term of seven years on the Acis Group Board.

Kelly, who has been chairman designate since the summer, brings a wealth of entrepreneurial and business experience to the role having held senior positions within Lavazza, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Police Authority and West Lincolnshire Community Safety Partnership.

Kelly said: "It is a great honour to take up my appointment as chairman, and I look forward to helping Acis build on the success of recent years. This is a challenging time for our industry, but one that is full of opportunity for organisations like Acis to further enhance services and provide more affordable housing."



New Acis chairman Kelly Smith with Rod Must, chairman from 2011 to September 2015.

Half term activities for Manor residents

We have co-funded a new family inclusion and development project for residents living in our Sheffield homes.

The activities, managed by Manor After School Kids Klub (MASKK) and delivered by About Play, launched in October half term and will continue to run in the upcoming February half term and Easter holidays in 2016.

Sessions are focused on parents achieving new skills and qualifications while giving the children a chance to play. MASKK have been providing activities for local children for more than 15 years and continue to run weekly activities at Angleton Meeting Rooms each Thursday from 4.30pm for local children aged seven to eleven.

For more information, please contact craigjudson@maskk.org.uk, visit www.maskk.org.uk or search M.A.S.K.K on Facebook.



Galatia to the rescue!



The Galatia team didn't sit on the fence when they were asked to help spruce up a children's centre in Doncaster.

The staff at Mexborough Children's Centre approached Galatia to repair existing fencing, but the team went one better and totally replaced it.

Galatia general manager Chris Cuthbert and his team gave up their weekends to volunteer their time for this important project, in total donating 175 hours of time.

Chris said: "The centre asked for our support to replace an area of fencing to ensure the area is safe and attractive to use. As we all have busy day jobs servicing the domestic repair needs to thousands across the area, we opted to help over a weekend and spent Saturday and Sunday completing the work, with materials kindly donated from Jacksons, Travis Perkins and 360 Paint."

Out and about... with Acis tenancy support officers

Our tenancy support officers Adelle Moore and Rebekah Kelly talk through what they do and how they make a difference.



☛ What is a tenancy support officer?

Rebekah: We offer support to tenants in their own homes to ensure that they do not feel isolated and unable to cope with problems they may be facing and avoid the risk of eviction.

Adelle: Some people find it difficult to manage because they are first time tenants; however some existing tenants also struggle to cope, so we offer a helping hand to allow people to maintain a successful tenancy.

We help with issues such as health problems, debt, drug and alcohol dependencies and mental health issues – they all affect how a person can manage a tenancy. Although we maybe can't help with some of these directly we can link into external agencies that can.

☛ What specifically do you do?

Rebekah: We can assist you to set up and run your home well by advising and supporting you to set up suppliers.

Adelle: We can help you find furniture, deal with rent and bills, give you advice on managing financial affairs and claiming benefits. We can also advise on insurance and security information and understanding the tenancy agreement. As well as this we can support you into further education and training courses.

☛ What other organisations do you work alongside?

Adelle: We work with a variety of partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Addaction, Riverside Training, Gainsborough College, the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities, and Lincolnshire Community Assistance Scheme.

☛ Can you describe a typical day?

Rebekah: We check the referral email address every day to see if there are any new referrals that need support and update our records with any new details.

We then contact new people to make appointments for a support assessment to be carried out on a home visit. Following that, we assess people's needs and draw up appropriate action plans follow-up and keep in touch with all customers who have accessed our support.

☛ What are the main questions you get from tenants?

Rebekah: We get asked a lot of things:

How do I find out who my utility suppliers are and how do I register?

Are there any grants available to help me move and set up my home?

Am I receiving the right benefit entitlement?

Do you provide furnished accommodation?

Can I get help getting into work?

Are there any courses I can enrol on to?

We can help with all of these things - that's what we're here for.

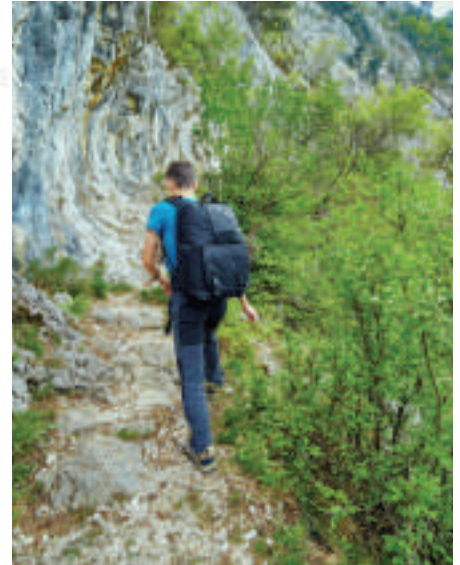
☛ What is the best piece of advice you could give to tenants?

Adelle: Don't be afraid to ask for help and advice. Contact us and let us know, we're here to help!

If you would like to find out more call Adelle Moore on 07786 334981 or Rebekah Kelly 07771 743766
email tenancysupport@acisgroup.co.uk

Free adventure holiday up for grabs

Galatia - our partnership with Willmott Dixon, are offering young people who live in an Acis property the opportunity to go on an amazing free five-day adventure holiday to rural Wales.



We're looking for young tenants aged 16-24 from across our homes that deserves to be nominated for the week-long holiday in March 2016. Perhaps they've done something amazing and out of the norm, taken on extra responsibilities at home, have a disability or you just feel deserves this chance.

Activities could include:

- Mountain biking
- Canoeing
- Gorge walking
- Climbing
- Mountaineering
- Caving
- Walking

Four lucky residents will win the prize and be treated to the outdoor experience of a lifetime.

The holiday is being run by UK charity Wide Horizons – one of Galatia's charities of the year. And the places for this fantastic holiday have been funded through fundraising activities carried out by the Galatia team!

To nominate yourself or someone for the prize, email your name, address and contact information with details about the young person including 50 words about why they deserve to win to Kathryn.Murdoch@galatia-awdp.co.uk or call 01427 675723.

Terms and conditions apply.



better homes

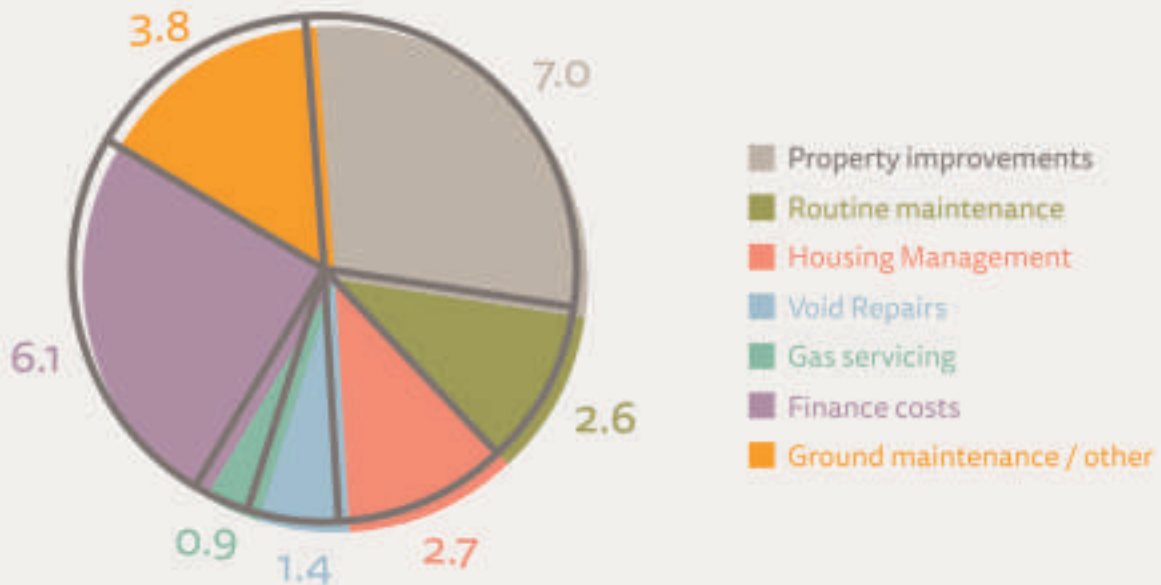


76.2%
customers happy
with the quality
of their home

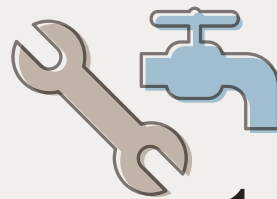


£7m
spent on
improving
homes

How your rent is spent £m



155
new homes
built



1,794
home improvements
completed





better services



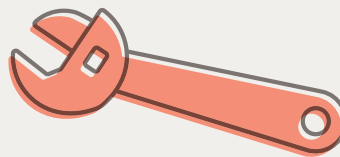
84.9%
customers happy
with our quality
of service



78,678
customer calls
handled



98.9%
of appointments
kept



96.9%
repairs
completed first
time



98.9%
of rent collected



better lives

393
antisocial behaviour
issues resolved



85% of tenants
happy

with their neighbourhoods

282
fly-tipping
incidents
cleared



**This is just a flavour of what
we've done in 2014/15.
To find out more visit
www.acisannualreview.co.uk**

Energy switching workshops

Making you an #energyexpert

Following on from our feature about energy switching in the last edition of home news, we've joined forces with the Department of Energy and Climate Change through the Big Energy Saving Network to deliver a series of training and engagement activities to help you get the most out of your energy provider.

We're running a series of energy switching workshops across all areas that we work as part of our commitment to providing better homes, better services and better lives for our customers.

We know that many of our customers find it hard to manage energy bills and struggle to pay rising energy bills particularly through the winter months. If you've not switched your energy provider in the last few years it's likely we can help you to save up to £274* annually on your gas and electricity bills.

We understand the energy market is a confusing place and we will provide the guidance and a platform to help you get started. Just bring along an open mind and a copy of your most recent energy bills.



Our energy experts can help you choose the right tariff, provider and payment method for your lifestyle making switching hassle free with no obligation to switch.

At Acis, we want to help you to combat these issues. Our free energy workshops will help you on your switching journey with the potential to save £274*.

To register your interest in attending one of these workshops please contact Anna Cooper, energy management officer on 01427 675772 or register your interest on our website at www.acisgroup.co.uk

*based on a dual fuel tariff paid by direct debit.

Did you know

- Ofgem estimates that over half of UK households are still with their original energy provider
- A third of consumers have found themselves in an average £154 in fuel debt due to estimated readings on bills
- You can still switch supplier if you are on a prepayment meter and in up to £500 worth of fuel debt
- The average fuel bill increased by 24% between 2009 and 2013 with further price increases of between 14% and 25% predicted by Ofgem by 2020
- You could save £86 a year by turning appliances off rather than leaving them on standby
- Using a thermostat and controlling your heating electronically could save you £59 a year

Budgeting for winter

Short days, cold nights, expensive nights out. Yes it's winter time, and the extra costs you could be paying out can make a huge difference to the money you have for the rest of the year.

Here Andy Webb from the Money Advice Service gives his top four tips to keep your finances going until the spring.



Plan your Christmas and New Year spending

The festive period can be one of the most expensive times of the year as the cost of socializing, gifts and travel adds up. Our top tip for staying in control is to work out what you can afford to spend using our Christmas money planner. It's easy to use and will take you through everything you need to think about.

www.moneyadvice.org.uk/en/tools/christmas-money-planner

Set a money goal

We all have the best intentions to make some changes in January, but a resolution that simply says "spend less" won't help you if there are bigger problems with your finances. If there's something big you know you need – whether that's a holiday next summer or moving into your own place after graduation rather than back with the folks - January is the time to start working towards it.

Check your home is covered

If we get another cold spell, it could cause havoc to your home, including frozen pipes and leaky roofs. Your possessions could easily be ruined by excess water that finds its way into your house. Make sure you have contents

insurance to protect anything expensive, like laptops or tablets. Even things like clothes can be expensive to replace if you have a wardrobe full.

www.moneyadvice.org.uk/en/articles/contents-insurance-get-the-right-policy-and-cover

Catch up on those boxsets

When the weather improves there's plenty to do outside. But with the nights drawing in quicker, take advantage of being able to stay in by bingeing on those TV shows you've never got around to watching. Even better, iPlayer and All 4 have plenty of top quality programmes for free. That way you can save your money for the times you really want to spend it.

To find out more visit

www.moneyadvice.org.uk

Making a difference

TLSP members Doreen Overbury, Olive Ellis, Nigel Hornsey and Nigel Freeman with reporter Matt Needham.



A group of Acis tenants continue to make a difference in their communities. Home news went to meet the members of the Tenant-Led Scrutiny Panel.

In 2011, a group of tenants came together to form the first-ever Tenant-Led Scrutiny Panel (TLSP) to assess Acis' performance on behalf of the thousands of people the organisation provides homes and services for. Almost five years on, the group is still going strong.

The TLSP operate independently from Acis, ensuring its customers receive resident-centred services of the highest standard. Members assess Acis' performance and can establish priorities for improvements going forward.

They meet regularly to discuss the services that Acis delivers and embark on focused projects where they review certain topics, led by conversations with tenants and residents, and make detailed recommendations to the Acis board.

Two of its original members, Doreen Overbury and Olive Ellis, are still part of the panel today alongside Nigel Hornsey and chairman Nigel Freeman and can remember the early days.

Doreen said: "It all started from a steering group we were on and developed from there. We had been quite vocal about our local

community and wanted to get involved. We wanted to have our voices heard."

The two Nigels joined the panel later after moving into Acis properties.

The panel communicates with other Acis tenants and residents through telephone, house visits, coffee mornings and focus groups. So far, it has investigated and made recommendations on a number of different topics, including the complaints procedures, planned improvements and the quality of the homes and neighbourhoods as places to live.

Nigel Freeman said: "Everything we do is evidence-led. It's not about hearsay – everything has to be proven. We investigate and assess against national standards or trends and see how we think Acis can improve its services to the people it serves."

"It takes about six to nine months to complete a review and then we go back to see how they've taken on board our recommendations. Our recommendations have definitely been taken on board by Acis and we are keeping an eye on these services to ensure that the agreed improvements have been put into place."

"We would not be able to complete these service reviews without input from other people who have kindly responded to telephone surveys, completed questionnaires and attended focus groups."

Making a difference

Examples of the impact the panel has had include ensuring Acis carries out regular estate inspections that are promoted in advance and that any actions arising from the inspections are properly completed and publicised (see page 13 for news of the latest inspections). It also urged Acis to look into new technologies to enhance energy efficiency – something the organisation is very committed to.

The next topic is 'green space management' which will look at gardens and communal green spaces around Acis properties.

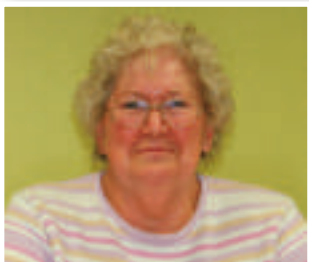
Acis has seen how valuable the input of the TLSP has been over the past five years and is committed to continuing a level of scrutiny by the people who receive our services.

The panel can be made up of up to 12 residents, meaning there are places to be filled. Panel membership is an ideal opportunity for those who want to make a difference in improving the services received by other tenants. Members must be able to regularly commit time to the TLSP and will be required to attend monthly meetings, training days, as well as extra related work such as reading through material and carrying out reality checking with other tenants. The benefits of being involved include having the opportunity to learn new skills such as working as a team, understanding and questioning performance information and learning how to write reports – all great skills to add to your CV.

For more information, contact Lucy Picksley customer engagement coordinator on freephone 0800 027 2057 or email getinvolved@acisgroup.co.uk.



My name is Doreen Overbury, I am a retired teacher and I live in Market Rasen. I was a member of the steering group that helped set up the Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel. I have been a member from the start of the panel. I enjoy helping out with many of the activities at Lammas Leas (sheltered housing). I also enjoy reading and genealogy.



My name is Olive Ellis, I am a retired dress maker and up to retirement I ran a dress making/haberdashery shop in Lincoln. Along with Doreen I was a member of the steering group that helped set up the Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel. I have found that being on the panel has helped me as a person and it feels good to have helped to change things for all Acis tenants. I would recommend anyone to come and help.



My name is Nigel Hornsey, I have lived in Welton as a tenant since 1994 with West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) and since 1999 with Acis. In my working life I was employed as a tool maker. I've also worked as a part time lecturer at Lincoln College teaching mechanical engineering. I am currently a member on the Local Management Board (LMB) and Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel. I also work on local issues as a parish councillor.



My name is Nigel Freeman, and I have been a tenant of Acis for six years, and am currently chair of the Tenancy Led Scrutiny Panel. I have previous experience in welding, quality management and project management within the mechanical engineering construction industry. I have also been a business owner. I am a qualified squash coach and I run 'Gainsborough Squash', offering coaching to all ages.

Walking around the local neighbourhood



Estate inspections are a great way to get involved and take a look at our neighbourhoods, identify areas for improvement, and raise any concerns you may have.

All customers are invited to join us to check out the areas and suggest any ways of improving them.

Why not join us?

Lower Manor inspections

- Third Friday of every month - Friday 18 December 2015
10am start - meeting at Lidl supermarket, Alison Crescent

Woodthorpe inspections

- Second Friday of every month - Friday 11 December 2015
10am start - meeting at Nodder Road shops

For more information about estate inspections in and around Sheffield please contact Neighbourhood Warden Rob Higgins on 01427 675784 or email robert.higgins@acisgroup.co.uk

Gainsborough, West Lindsey and Lincolnshire

Please call Neighbourhood Warden Heather MacPherson on 01427 675812 for an informal chat about estate inspections in Gainsborough, and rural areas in West Lindsey and Lincolnshire.

What we've found on our recent inspections

Woodthorpe and Lower Manor

- 4 incidents of dumped rubbish - clearance requested
- 8 untidy gardens identified and 'alert' cards issued
- 1 incident of damage to communal window - repair order raised

Park Springs, Gainsborough

- 10 abandoned supermarket trolleys and incidents of fly tipping – (items left on non Acis land) – incidents were reported to the local authority
- 13 untidy gardens identified and 'alert' cards issued
- incidents of dumped rubbish – clearance order raised



Get on the property ladder

Shared ownership is a great way to get on the property ladder. Our part-buy, part-rent scheme is designed to help people who are not in a position to buy a home outright on the open market.

It allows you to buy a share of a home from us and pay rent on the rest, with the opportunity to increase your share over time as you wish to do so.

We have a number of shared ownership properties on offer, with homes to suit every need. Visit acisgroup.co.uk/shared-ownership-homes-available.

For more information, call our Commercial team on 0800 027 2057 or email info@acisgroup.co.uk.



Our performance



Beating our target



Below our target but within tolerance level



Not meeting our target or tolerance level

^ Profiled target and changes on a monthly basis.

| Service area | Target satisfaction for 2015/16 | Total number of respondents (31 October 2015) | Satisfaction to date (31 October 2015) |
|--|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Customer satisfied with the overall service provided | 84.6% ^ | 421 | 82.9% |
| Customers satisfied with the overall quality of their home | 78.4% ^ | 421 | 72.4% |
| Customers satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live | 81.7% ^ | 426 | 79.8% |
| Customer satisfied with the overall repairs and maintenance service | 93.1% | 2104 | 93.9% |
| Customer satisfied with the outcome of recent contact | 83.1% | 412 | 81.8% |
| Customers satisfied with the outcome of an antisocial behaviour case | 93.0% ^ | 53 | 96.4% |
| Customer satisfied that their views are taken into account | 75.0% | 390 | 75.6% |
| Percentage of Customer Service Promises met | 100% | n/a | 93.7% |

Simon's blog

It's been a busy few months since our last home news, so in this issue I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight a few of our recent value for money (VFM) successes:



You'll have noticed that along with your home news this month you've received your rent statement too. This move not only reduces postage costs, but also means we can present your rent statement clearer and easier. It also means we can get you your rent statement regularly – every quarter with every issue of home news.

For the sixth year running we have held our successful young people's' event - Firecracker, securing funding from the Dulverton Trust, see page 3 to find out more. We've been looking at how we invest in communities. And we've also significantly increased the amounts we invest in works to make our estates better places to live.

We've also been busy renewing and renegotiating contracts for things like gas, electric, mobile phones and printers, and have to date saved over £40,000, whilst continuing to ensure we can still provide the level of service we need for all our customers.

If you have any ideas for how we can get more value for money, please get in touch.

Simon

Competition time

Competition winners

Autumn home news word search competition

Well done to Mrs Baxter from Friesthorpe who was the winner of our Autumn 2015 home news word search competition. Thank you to everyone who took part in the competition. See opposite for the answers to the word search.



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

Repairs satisfaction survey

Mrs Whitton of Stow was the lucky winner of the quarterly prize draw for our repairs service satisfaction questionnaire. She receives £25 worth of vouchers.



Festive word search

To be in with a chance of winning £20 worth of vouchers, simply find all the words from the list hidden in the grid.

- Angels
- Bell
- Carol
- Donkey
- Elves
- Gifts
- Holly
- Mistletoe
- Snowman
- Reindeer
- Toy
- Tree
- Star

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