

inspire

issue 20

in this issue:

- An inspector's diary
- New housing surgeries
- Improvement update



providing homes, **improving lives**

A close shave for charity

Spire Homes' Chairman, John Farrar, had a really close shave at the start of 2010 as he raised money for charity.

For three years John wore a well-tended and presentable beard but when he heard of our efforts to raise money for Homeless International he cut to the chase and opted for a clean shave. With sponsorship secured, John let Georgina from Sarah's Salon in Rushden get to work (above).

While John was in the barber's chair two other Spire Homes' Directors were thousands of miles away in Western Ghats in Kerala, India, undertaking a ten-day trek for charity, which raised some £60,000!

Julie Doyle, Managing Director, and Lynn Stubbs, Director of Business Services, joined 14 other people (pictured right) for the

trek to the top of Western Ghats, Kerala as part of our efforts to raise money.

Monsoon conditions, leeches, torrential rain, gusting wind and eight hour treks up the world's highest tea plantation in up to 40 degree heat meant the hike was almost unbearable.

However, visiting Homeless International projects in Bangalore and meeting the dedicated people working for the charity more than made up for the blisters and sore feet.

"It was a very humbling experience and a real lesson in how people can overcome incredible challenges with a strong spirit



and a little extra support," said Julie. The money raised will be used by Homeless International to build better lives for the people of Kerala, by providing emergency medical care, school uniforms for children, building toilets and other such things that we take for granted.

What's in a name?

The hard work and commitment of our current Chairman have been recognised as we've named our brand new development Farrar Court, in Irthlingborough, after him!

The need for specially-designed accommodation for the over 55s was so great that all 29 properties were snapped up straight away.

June moved in just before Christmas, and she has never looked back. "The building is wonderful. I love my flat, have friendly neighbours and the surrounding area is beautiful. We are setting up a residents' association and will hold coffee mornings, baking days and other activities to help raise money. Without the communal facilities we wouldn't be able to do this".



New Housing Officer map enclosed

It's fixed - you win £25



You know we want you to tell us about our repairs service. Well, we want more feedback, so we're now entering everyone who replies into a monthly free prize draw to win £25 worth of shopping vouchers!

If you've got internet access you can also enter our monthly draw by completing the repairs survey online at www.spirehomes.org.uk (go to quick links)

Warming to improvements

Our non-traditional improvement programme is in full swing and we're busy improving the heating systems and insulation at many of our properties.

By adding new cladding to the outside of houses, improving insulation and modernising heating systems we're able to make our properties warmer, more efficient and cut the cost of heating them.

By the time we've finished this programme at the end of March, we'll have improved 74 homes in just nine months.

If you think your heating system isn't working or isn't capable of heating your home properly then let Jody Brooker know by calling us on **0845 603 5399**.



After and before

Rent Free Weeks

As you know historically the 4 rent free weeks have been the first week in April, two weeks at the end of July (factory fortnight) and Christmas week.

From April the rent free weeks have changed to 2 weeks over Christmas and New Year and 2 weeks at the end of March. The dates for the new rent free weeks are:

20th December 2010 27th December 2010
21st March 2011 28th March 2011

Between the 12 month period of 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011 you will still get your 4 rent free weeks, but just at a different time.

Hopefully this will be good news – most of you welcomed it when we asked you, but if you need to talk to us, then please call us on **0845 603 5399**.

As a reminder, shared owners are not entitled to the 4 rent free weeks.

It's a gas

Kinetics. That's the name you need to remember when it comes to heating repairs and servicing from now on.

We've recently changed contractors and now Kinetics, which have an excellent reputation for providing services, are our partner.

To keep you and your family safe, it is really important that you allow access so your gas appliances can be serviced. By law, Spire Homes is responsible for making sure that gas appliances, fittings and flues are maintained in good order and are checked every 12 months by a Gas Safe Registered engineer. We have a legal obligation to do this, so we will have no choice but to take action against you if you do not allow access.

And, if you have solid fuel appliances then they too need an annual service and your chimney needs sweeping every year.

To get in touch with Kinetics you still need to phone us on 0845 603 5399 and then press 1 and then 2 as usual. Another message will then ask you to select another option, at this point you will need to select option 4.



It's personal

According to our recent survey, you want to see more of us! So, for 2010 we're introducing Housing Surgeries – giving you the opportunity to come and talk to us face-to-face.

Why not come and see us?

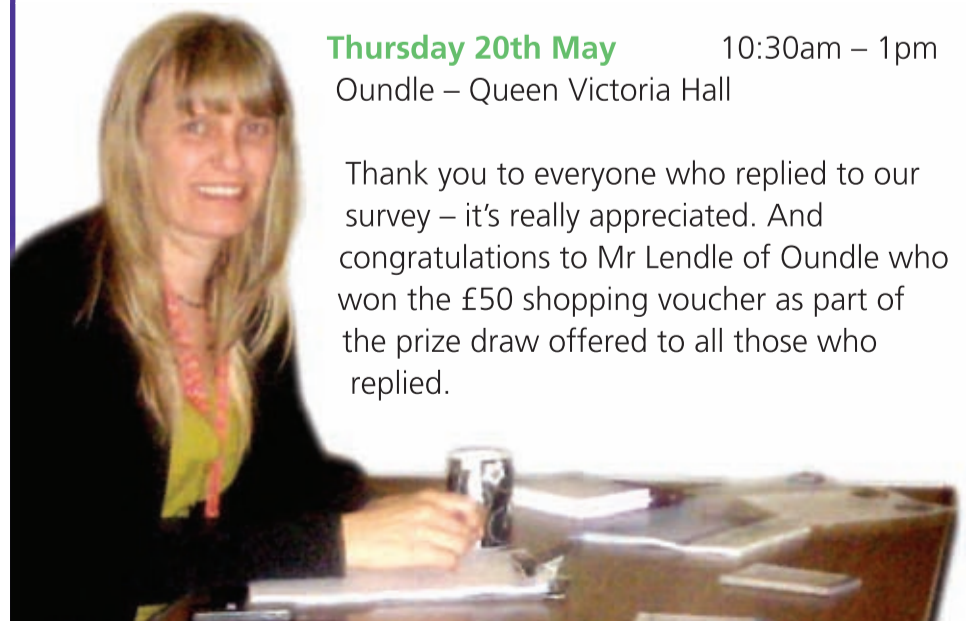
Tuesday 27th April 10am – 12:30pm
 Rushden – Nene Valley Home Choice, Library Building, Newton Road

Wednesday 28th April 10am – 12:30pm
 Raunds – Saxon Hall, Thorpe Street

Thursday 29th April 10am – 12:30pm
 Thrapston – Methodist Church Hall, Market Road

Thursday 20th May 10:30am – 1pm
 Oundle – Queen Victoria Hall

Thank you to everyone who replied to our survey – it's really appreciated. And congratulations to Mr Lendle of Oundle who won the £50 shopping voucher as part of the prize draw offered to all those who replied.



Going Walkabout

We spy with our little eye. It's amazing what we come across when out on our walkabouts, but we're determined to work with you to improve neighbourhoods.

Our walkabout programme has been running for some time, but it's not too late to join our Housing Officers on their patrols. It's your chance to point out the things we need to improve.

During April and May, we'll be visiting Stanwick, Chelveston, Hargrave and Thrapston. If you'd like to join in just give us a call.

General needs housing walkabouts

Date	Time	Area	Housing Officer
14th April	10.00am	Stanwick, Raunds Road, Cumberland Avenue, Mansfield Street, Dolben Avenue, Parklands, West Street	Caroline Murray starting at Raunds Road
12th May	10.00am	Chelveston & Hargrave, Hillside, Sawyers Crescent, Nags Head Lane, Hargrave	Caroline Murray starting the walkabout at Hillside and Hargrave at 10.45am

Supported housing walkabouts

Date	Time	Area	Housing Officer
14th April		Thrapston, Manor Close, Oakleas Rise, Cedar Drive, Glebe Close, Heron Avenue	Linda Graves starting at Manor Close Flats



An Inspector's Diary

Improving the standards of the properties we re-let has been a challenge for our Resident Inspectors, but great progress is being made – as you can see from this Inspector's diary.

November - The project started with a two day training session. Patrick Clarke from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) taught us the techniques we need to carry out a successful inspection.

December - We spent time meeting staff and contractors who will be helping us with the project. We gained an insight into their role in the re-let standard process. We were also introduced to managers from FWA West and Jeakins Weir.

Mid December - Out on inspection! We spent a day work shadowing the repairs and housing department, looking at soon to be vacant properties and visiting houses about to be repaired.

January - We interviewed staff to get their opinions and to find out how they think the re-let standard could be improved. We spent time talking to FWA West and Jeakins Weir staff as well as the directors of Spire Homes. I don't know who was the most nervous, the staff or the inspectors!

Mid-January - Today we spoke to tenants who have been in their homes for a year or less, finding out what was good when they moved in and what they felt could be improved.

February - We met up to look at how we are going to use the information we have been collecting and started writing up our findings to pass to staff.

What comes next? Lots. We'll be working with staff to make sure our suggestions are taken forward.

Andy and Sally interviewing Lynn Stubbs



Jargon Busters Needed

Do you like the way our newsletters and leaflets are written? Could the style or content be improved? Let us know - become a Jargon Buster!

Jargon Busters will sit on our Editorial Panel with staff, which helps to write our newsletter, but will also start to look at leaflets and other publications to make sure information is in a clear and easy to understand style – that's why we've nicknamed them Jargon Busters.

For more details please call Charlotte Holley on 01572 725680.



Focus Performance

FWA West has continued to deliver an excellent repair service! They dealt with every one of the 5,306 repair jobs during July to December 2009 on time.

With satisfaction levels running at 96%, the vast majority of tenants are pleased with the way we're handling repairs. You also told us that you are pleased with the way FWA West deals with your telephone calls, with 97%

satisfaction recorded for this, as well as 99% for leaving your home clean and tidy after the work.



Getting your point across

Congratulations to Spire Homes' tenant Dave Stuttle who has been selected to sit on the National Tenant Voice (NTV).

Dave was one of 1,200 people who applied for one of the 50 places on the new NTV, which will work with the recently formed Tenant Services Authority to give tenants a chance to share their views at national level.

"This is a golden opportunity for tenants to be involved in influencing housing policy at a national level," says Dave. "There are over 8 million tenants who now potentially have a voice and an opportunity to make their views heard. We have had the first meeting of the NTC and have made a very good start by responding to the TSA new regulatory framework".

We wish Dave all the best with his new role.



The winner for the Winter issue of Inspire is: Ms J Horn from Rushden. The answer was Glitter.

Send entry to **Inspire, Spire Homes, 1 Crown Court, Crown Way, Rushden, Northamptonshire, NN10 6BS** for a chance to win a £20.00 Argos voucher by 30 April 2010.

You said ... We did

As a result of your feedback, we now know that you'd like to be kept more informed of what we're doing after you report anti-social behaviour (ASB). You'd also like the case to be dealt with quicker and to receive more in-depth advice from our staff.

We've listened to you and made changes to help. For example, we now have an improved ASB recording system in place, which logs and monitors progress from your first call through to the final response. We've set targets for our staff and these are being closely monitored.

We're not perfect (yet) but to ensure we reach the high standards we've set ourselves we're about to sign up to the national ASB accreditation. This means an independent assessor will investigate how we deal with ASB.

We will also be reviewing our ASB policy and would like your ideas and suggestions. So, if you'd like to be more involved in the work we are doing around ASB please get in touch. You can download the policy from our website and use the on line form to give us your feedback.



Cool Calendar

People tell us they like it and hopefully you're using it every day, but what do you really think to this year's calendar? Please help us to make 2011's calendar our best ever by visiting www.spirehomes.org.uk/tenants/calendar_questionnaire_2010 and completing the short survey. What's more, everyone who helps us out will be entered into a prize draw to win a £25 High Street Voucher!



inbrief



Inspire formats

Your Inspire newsletter is now available in different formats. If you require a version on tape, in braille, in a different language or large print, please contact us on 0845 603 5399 and we will be happy to help you.



Getting in touch

You can now contact us by email at : spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk

Our main office number is:

0845 603 5399

Our text number is:

447797 800 062

Log onto: www.spirehomes.org.uk

Opening Hours

Monday to Thursday 9am - 5pm
Friday 9am - 4.30pm

The office will be closed on **2nd and 5th April for Easter** and on **23rd April for a staff training day**

COMPETITION Easter Wordsearch

Find the hidden words running forward, backward, upward, downward or diagonally.

Which one is missing?

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

- EGG
- BUNNY
- CHICKS
- DAFFODILS
- HOLIDAY
- HUNT
- CHOCOLATE
- BASKET
- CAKES
- BONNET
- TULIPS
- PARADE

Name:

Address:

..... Age:

The missing word is: