

# inspire

in this issue:

- Our new website
- Safety grants up for grabs
- Spire in Bloom competition



## Inspired to listen

# A really satisfying partnership

In April last year we teamed up with FWA West as our new repairs contractor and our first year of working with them has been fantastic – with customer satisfaction reaching an all-time high!

At 96% - this is our highest ever score for customer satisfaction – and this performance puts us in the top 25% of all housing associations in the country.

You've played your part in this success too! You asked us to introduce a better appointment system. You also wanted us to make sure more repairs were fixed first time and you wanted to be able to call the contractor directly. We listened and have introduced all of these features.

The results of the new system and FWA West's efforts have been great. Between the beginning of January and end of March this year, 946

repairs have been carried out. 100% of our 'Priority 1' repairs were completed on time within the 24 hour deadline, as were all the Priority 2 jobs and 98% of Priority 3 repairs were completed within the 28 days timeframe.

"We are really pleased that residents are happy with the new improved repairs service and that the changes they wanted to see introduced are working," says Property Services Team Leader, Phil Ison. "FWA West has become a valuable member of our team and everyone is seeing the benefits of a much more customer focused approach."

As well as repairs, FWA West will also be carrying out all of our improvement works for the coming year, as the company has been awarded our 'Major Works Contract'.



*Neil from FWA West and Jody from Spire Homes celebrating the new partnership*

FWA West will be undertaking all our roofing, electrical upgrades and external improvements following the appointment process, which saw tenants joining Spire Homes' staff on the interview panel.

## Win a Nintendo Wii at our next Fun Day

This is just one of the fantastic prizes on offer at our next Fun Day, which takes place on Saturday 12th September at the Saxon Hall in Raunds.

There will be a wide range of activities for children and you can make your views count by joining one of the discussion

groups. There will also be a host of outside organisations present on the day giving advice and information.

Doors are open from 10.30am until 2.30pm, with lunch and transport available.

It promises to be a great day - more details will be sent to you soon.



## A family affair

There's more than a sense of déjà vu for one of our tenants who's recently used the Nene Valley Homechoice to find a new home.

Douglas, 79, has lived in Nassington nearly all his life and when he decided to move he didn't expect for one minute to end up in his mother's old home!

The bungalow that Douglas now lives in, was also his mother's home between 1950 and 1989, when she passed away. It might have changed since then, with a new kitchen, bathroom and heating system being installed but it still has a very special feel to it.

Douglas has many happy memories of the property and moving in has made a real difference to him.

Housing Officer, Caroline Mallaby, helped him through the process of using Nene Valley Homechoice, to find his new home, so everything has worked out perfectly.

His first bid for a property was unsuccessful but when this bungalow was advertised he placed his bid and was successful.

The Nene Valley Homechoice is a new scheme to help improve customer choice in finding social housing. One of the main benefits is that it is much simpler and clearer than the old points system.

People looking to move need to register before they can bid on properties that are of interest to them. For an application form please call 08456 032 227.



## Our Tenant Liaison Officer of the Year

Congratulations to Anne Manning for reaching the Midlands' Final in the prestigious Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Awards.

Anne, along with a group of supporters travelled to London for the awards evening, to see if she'd been named Midlands' Tenant Liaison Office of the Year.

Unfortunately, a Youth Participation Officer from another housing association pipped Anne to the award, but being shortlisted is a real honour.

"It is a real shame that Anne didn't win but we are all extremely proud of her," said Katy Sagoe, Director of Housing Services. "Anne works incredibly hard and is extremely popular with the tenants she helps and the people she works with. To us, she really is a winner".



## Cash concerns? JUST CALL!

The Credit Crunch and deepening recession is a worry for everyone and it is not surprising that organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are busier than ever.

Delays in getting help and advice can be really frustrating, especially if you are struggling to make ends meet.

Since starting our partnership with the CAB in January we've referred over 50 people to them over the last few months. Knowing that having someone available to listen to problems and suggest solutions is a real benefit.

So, if you are worried about paying your rent, just call our Income Recovery Team on 0845 603 5399.



## The wait is nearly over

For people living in our non-traditional houses the wait for upgrade work to start is almost over.

We've appointed Wates Living Space to deliver our upgrade programme, with work already in progress.

The Wellingborough company will, between now and April 2010, undertake a variety of improvements, from applying structural, insulating render to some properties and replacing worn out roofing to others.

The overall aim of the programme is to ensure that our non-traditional housing stock is well maintained and structurally sound for the next 30 years as well as tenants benefiting from lower energy bills as a result of increased insulation.



# NEW LOOK

## Check out our new website

### [www.spirehomes.org.uk](http://www.spirehomes.org.uk)

Things move so quickly in the wonderful world of the web. So, we weren't that surprised when customers told us our website needed a makeover!

We hope that you're pleasantly surprised and like our new-look website.

We've improved the home page – making it easier to navigate and adding a new search facility. We've improved the content too, making it easier to read and quicker to find the information you need. There's a calendar of events, a call back request and a wide range of leaflets to download, saving you time and money.

This is just the beginning though. Even more improvements are planned for the next 12 months.

As with everything we do, we'd like to know what you think to the new design, so please do click on one of the smiley or sad faces to give us your feedback.

We'd also like to hear from you if you have ideas for future improvements – just drop us an email at [spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk](mailto:spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk)



## YOU SAID... WE DID

### How we have used your feedback

Most people don't like to hear complaints but at Spire Homes we see them as an opportunity to improve our service.

Between April 2008 to March 2009 we received just 82 complaints and we responded to 99% of them within our promised timeframe of 10 working days.

### What did you tell us

You've asked us to keep you more informed of ongoing repair issues – so we introduced our 'Working with Respect' training, which emphasises the need for contractors to keep residents informed of any work that is in progress. People said that compensation took too long to come through so we've involved tenants in a review of our policy. Some said they needed more advice on how to treat mould and condensation, so we developed a new leaflet and staged a training session for our staff. We also reviewed our grounds maintenance contract and enhanced the service delivered to sheltered schemes as people said they were not as pleased as they could be.

At the moment, customer satisfaction is high, with 94% of people being satisfied with the response they received.

We hope you are happy with our service and you don't have anything you need to get off your chest, but if you do, please let us know.

## Is your garden set to bloom?

It's that time of year again! The weather is improving, days are getting longer and everything in the garden is starting to grow again, so it must be time to launch Spire in Bloom!

We want to hear from gardeners of all ages and all standards.

There are four categories to enter and we have some Podington Garden Centre vouchers up for grabs for those coming first and second in each category.

As well as the Sheltered and Scattered Housing, Tubs and Hanging Baskets and Individual Garden Display categories, there's also the Tallest Sunflower competition for children to enter. Free sunflower seeds are available by calling us.

Don't worry – there's plenty of time to get your garden, pots and plants looking their best – as the closing date isn't until 3rd August.

To enter, simply take a photograph of your garden, tub or hanging basket, add the category and your name, address and contact details to the back of it and post it to Sharon Boot at Spire Homes, 1 Crown Court, Crown Way, Rushden, Northants, NN10 6BS.



## Thank you for getting involved

Over the last six months we've been busy looking at how you can help us shape the services we provide, the things we do and the way we work.

We collected lots of feedback and used this as the basis of our new Resident Involvement Strategy for 2009 to 2011.

Michelle Layram, Resident Involvement Team Leader, oversaw the review. "We wanted to get residents feedback before developing our new strategy. The strategy sets out how we want residents to get involved and how we will put this into practice over the next 2 years. I'd like to thank everyone who got involved, it really has helped."

Our new Resident Involvement Strategy is available to anyone who would like a copy. For your copy please phone us on 0845 603 5399.



## MEET OUR NEW HOUSING OFFICER

We're delighted to be able to introduce you to a new member of our Housing Team – Caroline Murray.

Caroline joined the team as a new Housing Officer in May and is managing tenancies in Caldecott, Chelveston, Hargrave, Higham Ferrers, Stanwick, Rushden North and Rushden West.

Before moving into the Housing Team, Caroline spent time as a Housing Assistant and prior to that worked in our Customer Services Team.

"I'm really looking forward to my new role and getting to meet lots of new people," says Caroline.



## Performance Focus

Our telephone manner to you over the phone is vitally important to us – especially as 93% of you told us you preferred to contact us by telephone.

We're really pleased with the way in which we deal with telephone calls, and judging by your feedback – so are you!

Between January and March 2009, our One Stop Shop received 7,644 calls; 95% of these calls were answered and it took us on average 20 seconds to answer them. FWA West received 4,245 calls in the same period, answering 95% of these calls and within an average of 11 seconds.

What is really pleasing for us is that our performance has improved, even though the number of calls has increased by 8% since October.

We're also really happy that you're pleased with the telephone service we provide. Whenever anyone calls we ask them to let us know what they thought of the telephone service they received. Your feedback told us that 98% were satisfied with the service given, which is great news.



## Fancy a rent free Christmas?

Would not having to pay rent over Christmas and New Year be a welcome present?

As you know there are four 'rent free' weeks every year. Traditionally, these have been the first week in April, the last two weeks in July – factory fortnight – and Christmas week.

Rather than 2 free weeks being in July, we're considering making the last week in March and Christmas week rent free instead.

This would mean the four rent free weeks are the last week in March and the first week in April, then the Christmas and New Year fortnight.

What do you think? Would this make your life easier? Please let us know what you think by calling Margaret Robertson or Carrie Safford on 0845 603 5399.

## SECURE A SAFETY GRANT

If you or someone you live with are aged 60 or over, registered disabled or have been a victim of crime you may be eligible for a grant of £250 towards securing your home.

The Community Safety Fund can help to improve security on your house, garden and outbuildings by providing items such as door locks, key chains and security lighting. Unfortunately, it cannot be used towards fencing.

If you meet one of the three criteria, please call Louise Cahill at East Northamptonshire Council on 01832 742204 or Kelly Jones at Care & Repair on 01933 410084 for an application form.

## 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.

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### Getting in touch

You can now contact us by email at : [spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk](mailto:spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk)

Our main office number is:  
**0845 603 5399**

Our text number is:  
**447797 800 062**

Log onto: [www.spire-homes.org.uk](http://www.spire-homes.org.uk)

### Office Opening Hours

Our office is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

## COMPETITION

### Fruit Wordsearch

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

Which one is missing?

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

**BLUEBERRY**    **PEACH**    **CHERRY**  
**PLUM**    **APPLE**    **ORANGE**  
**BANANA**    **PAPAYA**    **MELON**  
**GRAPE**    **PEAR**    **KIWI**

Name: .....  
 Address: .....  
 ..... Age: .....  
 The missing word is: .....

The winner for Inspire issue 16 is: Pat Ward, Irthlingborough

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 July 2009.