

Tenant Topics

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Annual Review

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holiday!
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Leighton's on the wright track!

A young Aylburton father is pursuing his dream career, and Two Rivers Housing and Centigen are supporting his journey.

Dad-of-two Leighton Wright has his sights set on being a Chartered Quantity Surveyor and is doing everything he

can to achieve it, including changing jobs and studying part-time to gain the necessary qualifications.

First of all he juggled a part-time access course with long working hours as a head chef.



Leighton combines working for Centigen with studying for a completely new career

"I wanted to change direction in my career for a long time but it's particularly hard with a young family," explained Leighton. "However, I just needed to take the plunge and I'm so pleased I have."

"I'm really enjoying working with the Centigen team, which is more relevant to my future work ambitions than being a chef, and I'm getting on well with my studies."

"There's still a long way to go, but I have been getting 85% or more in all assignments to date which, in examination terms, is a 'distinction'."

Now he's joined the Centigen grounds maintenance team and started a four-year degree course in engineering.

Leighton (31), is being supported in his ambitions by the TRH David Garnett Bursary. Last year he applied to the fund for financial support and was granted an award to help pay for materials he may need to further his studies.

The bursary also offers him access to Two Rivers staff for mentoring support or work experience he may find useful as he progresses.

* See page 4 for how to apply for a TRH David Garnett Bursary award.



Raise money for Macmillan and you could win this spectacular handmade quilt as your prize!

Coffee and quilt

This beautiful handmade quilt is being raffled to raise money for Macmillan cancer charity.

It represents months of fine work by members of a textile group which meets at our Worcester Road Centre in Cinderford.

If you would like the chance to win this, or one of the many other prizes on offer, you are welcome to attend the World's Biggest Coffee Morning event on **29 September** at the centre, where

you can also enjoy cake, refreshments, a book stall, tombola, bric-a-brac and games.

Last year they raised over £560 for Macmillan, and the organising team of Scheme Co-ordinators – Ann Pugh, Marianne Roy, Gina Facchiano and Paul Gale – are determined to exceed that this year, particularly with such a fabulous top prize on offer.

Donations of raffle prizes before the day would also be very welcome.

Keep one step ahead

Rental payments are gradually being adjusted to make sure everyone pays their rent in advance, rather than in arrears.

This has been in force for all tenants who joined us on or after April 2016 but, although it has always been a clause in their tenancy for everyone else, we have not enforced it – until now.

This change will be most helpful for tenants claiming Universal Credit, and who face a delay of seven weeks or more before their first payment comes through. Paying rent in advance will reduce the impact of this long period without the income from benefits, and the potential for arrears.

We appreciate this will be difficult for people to pay in a lump sum, which is why we are phasing it in over this year and collecting a little bit extra with each payment, until the adjustment has been made.

If you are looking at your rent statement through 'My account' on our website, please be aware the adjustment will not currently be reflected in the balance you see. Therefore, you will need to take this into account when working out your balance. We are working to improve this.

If you have any questions about paying your rent in advance, please contact a member of our Income Collection team.

Garden on a plate



Dan Jones proudly displays his wonderful decorated plate

Some beautiful decorative plates were produced by the creative hands and minds that joined us for a fun afternoon in Ruardean.

We organised a workshop for children entering the Ruardean Carnival competition and asked them to bring along some old plates that they could turn into miniature gardens.

The results were exceptional and we really enjoyed helping them with the challenge.



Rita Jones is a happy surfer, now that she's learned how to use the internet

Rita's life is transformed

"Learning to use the internet has totally changed my life."

Rita Jones has been transformed from being completely terrified by the prospect of going online, to someone who now confesses to using it all the time.

The change came when she decided to confront her fears and join our Digital Academy. This gave Rita, who lives in Bream, a free tablet for a year, plus training and support from our staff – and the confidence and time to learn from her mistakes.

"Three years ago I had to submit my CV online and was close to tears because I hadn't a clue. It was so scary," explains Rita, recalling her early experience of the internet. Then she joined our training course.

"I had used the internet a little bit before, but the hardest part was overcoming the fear factor. What if I did

things wrong? However, I was able to relax at home and do it at my own pace, and gradually I got the hang of it.

"Now I'm on it all the time, using Facebook, YouTube, video conferencing and ordering things online. I'm in groups for gardening and with my family and I use it for learning, shopping and hobbies.

"I don't drive, it's an hour each way on the bus to Gloucester, and I might not find what I want when I get there. Now I can go online in the comfort of my own home, order what I need and get it delivered to my front door – and it's cheaper than the bus fare!"

"It has totally changed my life. I even listen to music I'd never heard of before, just because I've heard it online and realised how much I like it. It really broadens your horizons."

Free training

If you're inspired by Rita's story, you might like to take advantage of some **FREE** training.

Anyone wanting to claim Universal Credit will have to apply online (see page 5) so, although learning to do it may be a necessity, Rita has shown how it can enrich your life in many ways once you've grasped the basics.

There will be events at libraries across the whole county during Get Online Week which runs from **2 to 8 October**, and we're running a drop-in taster session at George Place in Berry Hill on **Thursday 5 October**, 2 – 4pm.

They're open to tenants of all ages and abilities. You don't even have to know how to switch a computer on!

We will also be running some six and 10-week courses in the new year.

If you would like to find out more, please contact our Community Engagement team.

Fall back



The days are already starting to get shorter which means it's time to change the clocks.

The key date is **Sunday 29 October**, when you will need to put your clocks **back** one hour at 2am.

Many hands make...

Our 'Helping Hands' have been busy over the summer, supporting various local charities and community groups.

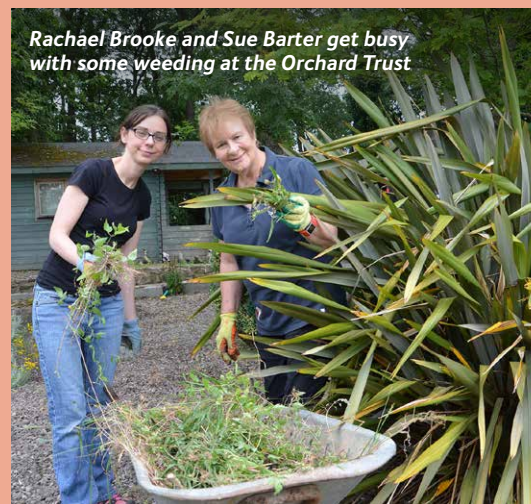
Taking time out of our normal working lives, we've weeded, cleaned, pruned, planted and painted our way towards

helping other organisations, and it's great to see the results at the end of a busy day.

So far, we have helped at local schools, the Orchard Trust, James Hopkins Trust, the ASHA Centre, Berry Hill Community Orchard and Cinderford Scouts, to name just a few.



Natalie Wilce, Owen Chandler, Angela Chambers, Simon Wheeler-Jones and Marlene Alford offer Helping Hands at the ASHA Centre



Rachael Brooke and Sue Barter get busy with some weeding at the Orchard Trust

Apply now!

Applications are now invited for the third year of the TRH David Garnett Bursary.

If you – or a close member of your family who lives with you – would welcome financial support to help start or continue a period of study or learning that could help you into work, or improve your career prospects, you are welcome to apply.

It could be an evening class, a one-day course or a longer-term study

commitment like Leighton, who's featured on our front page. You might use the money to fund childcare, travel expenses, materials, exams, affiliation of a professional group or the course itself.

The bursary has up to £1,000 available. The closing date is **1 December 2017** and further details, plus an application form, can be found in the 'Careers' section of our website.

Danger!

If you are planning any structural changes to your home, you must write to us and gain our permission before the work is carried out.

This is because we need to be sure the changes are safe and appropriate.

We recently discovered a lean-to structure had been put up without

permission, and a connection from the boiler flue made out of drainpipe and gaffer tape – inside the structure – put the occupants at serious risk of fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.

In this case we had to cap the gas supply until changes were made and we were satisfied the home was safe.

All costs associated with making alterations and any follow-up inspections, will be met by the tenant, so please talk to us before you make any changes.



Some colourful – and slightly scary! – faces from our latest Holiday Club



Happy holiday!

Our summer Holiday Club was a fabulous success, and we're already gearing up for the next one in October.

More than 30 children enjoyed an afternoon of free fun and entertainment, plus a wonderful lunch provided by Stroud-based 'The Wiggly Worm'.

They served a scrumptious and nutritious vegetable chilli with rice, followed by fruit with yoghurt and milk to drink – and all for no charge.

The next Holiday Club will be on **Wednesday 25 October** between midday and 2.30pm at Cinderford

Community Church, so make a date in your diary now and come along for some fun!

Please note all children must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

Universal Credit is on its way

Universal Credit comes to our area very soon, and represents a huge change to the way people receive their benefits.

If you are on a low to moderate income and under pensionable age, this could affect you if you need to make a new claim or have any changes to your current circumstances.

The changes will be introduced as follows:

- Stroud – October 2017
- Forest of Dean – November 2017
- Gloucester – February 2018
- Herefordshire – March 2018

Once your claim has been awarded, you will receive one monthly payment. This will be paid directly to your bank account and you will be responsible for using this to meet your commitments,

such as your rent. You will still have to make a claim for Council Tax through your local council office.

We recommend setting up a Direct Debit from your bank so that payments are made to us automatically, taking away the worry of having to remember to pay. Please contact us if you would like to arrange this.

All Universal Credit payments will be made in arrears, and it can take **seven weeks or more** for any money to be paid, so you must make sure you have other income or savings that will tide you over before the money comes through.

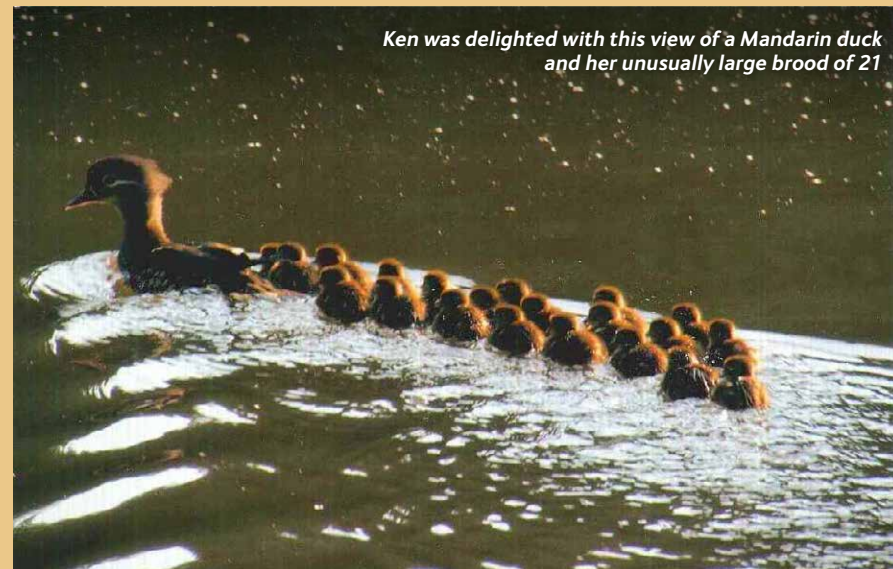
We've produced a leaflet about Universal Credit and the process you need to follow. You can find this in the 'Library' on our website.

If you're unsure about how to use the internet to make your claim, you might like to take advantage of some free training. (See page 3.)



UC Universal Credit

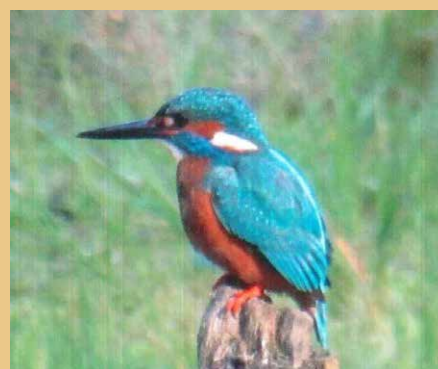
Snapper's patience is rewarded



Ken was delighted with this view of a Mandarin duck and her unusually large brood of 21



Ken Grindle spends lots of happy times enjoying nature in the area where he lives



Many hours of patiently watching and waiting were eventually rewarded with this excellent shot of a kingfisher

Come rain, come shine, Ken Grindle will be out in the woods every day with his trusty camera and a whole heap of patience.

But it's easy to understand why, when the amateur photographer is rewarded with thousands of beautiful pictures that capture the wildlife in our forest, including some rare and precious moments.

Some of his subjects are notoriously shy, such as hawfinches, jays, woodpeckers, chaffinches and redstarts, and Ken even hit the national headlines years ago when he caught an elusive white buck on his camera.

Every day, the retired builder heads out to various hides and nest boxes and patiently waits. "You never know what you are going to see," he said. "It took me months to properly capture a kingfisher at Soudley Ponds, but it was a lovely reward when I did."

Ken, who lives in Yorkley, has been enjoying his hobby for eight years and his pictures often appear in the local papers. "I take my photos to share with people and it's great when the newspapers print them for others to see," he explained. "Not everyone can get into the woods like I do and it is something I can share."

"I love seeing the birds and animals and my photography skills are getting better with time and experience. It can be frustrating, but it is very rewarding, too."

Bowled over!

Soft bowls has really taken off locally, proving to be a great way to exercise, have fun and socialise, too!

Existing groups in Sedbury and Ruardean are going strong and new ones are now joining the craze, bringing the whole community together and winning the support of GPs who see their patients getting fitter.

More than 70 people are playing soft bowls every month in Bream, Lydney, Mile End, Sedbury and Ruardean, and

three groups now have their own set of bowls, paid for with a grant from the Barnwood Trust.

The groups are open to people of all ages and abilities and we have two sets of bowls to loan to anyone wanting to get started.

If you'd like to find out what all the fuss is about, please contact our Community Engagement team for details of existing groups, or help with setting up a new one.



We're in the running!

Two Rivers Housing tenants and staff have been shortlisted for three separate national awards.

The nominations are:

- Our inspirational tenants at Parkside in Coleford, who could never be accused of letting the grass grow under their feet! You could not hope to find a more active, self-sufficient group of people who focus on living life to the full, raising money for charity and their own activities and getting fully involved with the wider community where they live.
- Our amazing Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team, which supports hundreds of tenants every year, helping them to manage their finances, claim the benefits they are entitled to and apply for grants. (Read more about them on page 9.)
- Our wonderful Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advisor Gwyn Yarlett, who is not only highly valued by the tenants she helps personally, but she regularly comes up with great new ideas, some of which – such as the popular Holiday Club – benefit so many more people.

All three have done incredibly well to make it through the preliminary rounds, and we look forward to bringing home some trophies when the winners are announced in October.

SAVING TIP

Cook extra in the evening and save some for tomorrow's lunch. Or freeze it for quick meals when time and money are tight.

Selling fast

The first new homes built under our 'Tandem Living' banner have proved really popular, with offers received on three in the first week they went on sale.

Since then, our estate agent subsidiary TwoCan has confirmed sales on eight of the two-bedroom bungalows and we expect the remaining two to be snapped up shortly. TwoCan has also been able to market their existing homes for some of the purchasers..

The Cleeve Chase development in Newent comprises 17 bungalows, seven of which will be for affordable rent. The rest are being sold on the open market and all profit will be invested in building new homes for our tenants.

We used the services of an interior design company to 'dress' the showhome, and that really brought it to life. In fact, one of the purchasers is buying the home with everything in it!

Work begins on our next Tandem Living scheme later this year at Alfrick in Worcestershire, where we will build a mixture of two, three, four and five bedroom homes.



Timmy Toucan, the TwoCan estate agency mascot, makes himself comfy in the bathroom!



The table set for dinner and some homely touches on the work surface turn this into a kitchen you really want to cook in



Come and try it

Students have been visiting Two Rivers over the summer to get a taste of the working world.

First were Year 9 students from Newent Community School who started their tour of local businesses from our office. Then we welcomed Ellie Tyler and Chloe Sutton from Forest High School, who

spent a whole week with us to gain a broader and deeper view.

With five days to fill, the 15-year-olds were able to spend time with various departments and learn about the many roles our staff perform, and they had time to help with a few tasks, as well.

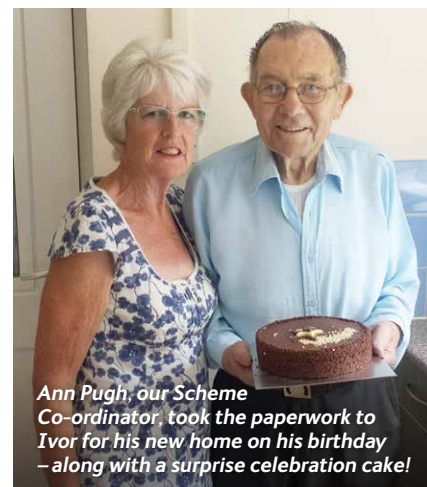
Ellie explained: ***"We have been involved in lots of different tasks and it has given us a good insight to what goes on. I enjoyed the time spent with the Customer Services team the most."***

We wish them all luck with their continuing studies and hope they took some useful learning away with them following their time with us.

Ivor's moving on

A 90th birthday is an anniversary well worth noting, but not usually by moving house!

However, that was the day Ivor Ward signed the tenancy on his new home in Drybrook, signalling the end of his time



in the Mitcheldean home where he lived for over half-a-century.

Ivor – known to many as Paddy – has lived in the Forest all his life, broken only by a three year posting to Egypt during his time with the Army.

The keen rugby player married Marion on his return to Gloucestershire and worked for many years at BRS in Mitcheldean as a lorry driver and fitter. When the company closed, he went to work in the boiler house at Rank Xerox.

Ivor marked his retirement by buying a caravan so that he and Marion could hit the open road on an adventure that took them throughout the UK and southern Ireland.

Ivor lost Marion in 2000, but he loves spending time with his son Nigel, daughter Sue and – the apple of his eye – his great grandson Henry.

Good game!

A regular games evening has started in Staunton near Gloucester and is drawing an enthusiastic crowd.

On offer are darts, table tennis, crib, dominoes and soft bowls, which means there should be something for everyone.

The games evening is held between 6 and 9pm in the communal room at Johnstone Close on the third Thursday of each month. It is open to the whole community and is free of charge, although participants are asked to make a contribution to the 'bring-and-share' buffet.

Just turn up on the night, or speak to our Community Engagement team for more information.

Let's play!

Two Rivers Housing has helped to produce a board game, designed to support people with dementia and those caring for them.

'Let's Talk Dementia' has been led by Forest of Dean District Council, but we worked closely with them, and other organisations, to fund and develop this innovative project which we hope will raise awareness and encourage discussion about this terrible disease.

Dementia affects a growing number of people and its effects are also keenly felt by family, friends and carers. We've been holding activities at many of our centres to raise awareness of it, and try to ward off its effects.

The game can be played at home with friends and family, in care homes, day centres, hospitals or schools. It has been distributed to libraries across the county



'Let's Talk Dementia' will help to raise awareness of dementia

so that it can be borrowed in the same way as a book.

We also hold several copies of 'Let's Talk Dementia' so, please contact our

Community Engagement team if you would like to borrow one and play the game at home or at an event.

The benefits are clear

Our Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team has worked wonders in the last 12 months, helping tenants to claim benefits and make successful grant applications.

In their busiest year to date, Gwyn Yarlett, Becky James and Owen Chandler secured more than £1 million worth of new and back-dated benefits, Discretionary Housing Payments and grants for items such as beds or kitchen

equipment – representing a massive £200,000 increase on the previous 12 months.

They also advised tenants on how to budget and manage their debts better, and worked with local foodbanks to help tenants struggling to feed themselves and their families.

"The team has provided amazing support to our tenants over the last few years, and it's incredible to see the positive impact and changes they can make to people's lives," said Debby Devo, Team Leader.

The team – which is recruiting an additional advisor – has now been shortlisted for a national award. (See page 7.)

If you would like to ask our Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team for help, please call 0800 316 0897 for a confidential appointment.



Owen Chandler, Gwyn Yarlett and Becky James are helping hundreds of tenants to manage their money

SAVING TIP

Discuss doing Secret Santa with friends and family to save money and stress! Ask them for a list of 5 ideas for under £10.

Roman finds

Fragments of Roman pottery are among items unearthed by archaeologists at the site of a block of flats we're building in Gloucester.

Hundreds of items have been collected at Wellington Street, which used to be the location of a 19th century school, including the stem of a clay pipe, a roof tile, and numerous pieces of pottery dating back to the days of the Roman empire, nearly 2,000 years ago.

The items were found by Cotswold Archaeology and, although they're of no significant financial value, they have been handed over to the Museum of Gloucester in order to aid its research.

The 22 one and two-bedroom city centre flats are due to complete at the beginning of next year.

Opportunity knocks!



A new kitchen has greatly improved facilities at the Children's Opportunity Centre

Meals at the Children's Opportunity Centre will be much easier to prepare in future, thanks to a refurbished kitchen.

Working with local builders' merchant Travis Perkins, we used a small joint community fund to provide the Coleford centre with the units, leaving parents, friends and volunteers to fit them.

Aside from providing refreshments and an informal meeting space for the parents and professionals who care for children with diverse and complex special needs, the kitchen is also used to run courses to help families whose children struggle with eating.

"We are very grateful to Two Rivers and Travis Perkins," said Caroline Jones, from the centre. **"They have enabled us to completely refurbish the kitchen at the Opportunity Centre, making it a safe and pleasant place for our staff and, of course, the children. Thank you all."**

Make a difference

Are you concerned by the number of people struggling to feed themselves or their families? Does the increasing demand on foodbanks worry you?

If so, you might be interested in joining our Tenants' Forum – a new group set up to try and tackle local issues relating to the community or Two Rivers' services. The Forum has attracted a great mix of tenants of all ages so far, and we're keen to welcome more people who want to work with others to achieve positive change.

Our September meeting was a discussion on the work of our Customer Services team and how they help our tenants, and now we're looking ahead to our next meeting on **Monday 13 November** when we will debate the huge issue of food poverty. This will be held at our office in Newent, starting at 6.30pm.

If you're interested in being part of this, please contact our Community Engagement team for further details.

Book your repair online

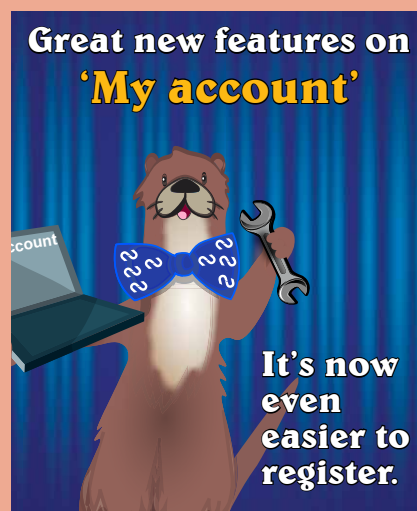
Have you tried our brand new online repairs reporting and booking system yet? If so, what did you think?

Many of you are now using the secure tenant area of our website called 'My account' and the first repairs were booked before the new system even launched, so some of you were very keen!

Feedback so far has been extremely positive. Everyone tells us it's quick and easy to use, and lots of people are using it when the office is shut, which means they can log the repair and make an appointment for it to be fixed at a time that suits them.

The registration process has been simplified recently and, with the instruction videos put together by our Online Tenant Information Service expert Otis, we hope everyone will find 'My account' accessible.

"I was otterly delighted with the response," said Otis. *"We tried to make the process as smooth as possible and the first repair booked online was completed just two working days later – a great moment for me! I encourage everyone to give it a try and see how easy it is."*



All sewn up!

The weather may have been unkind, but the rain failed to dampen the spirits of everyone at our free family fun morning in Coalway.

There were lots of smiling faces among the children who joined us to enjoy games, arts and crafts, storytelling from Gloucestershire County Council Library service and a healthy lunch.

This was one of our free activities to help tenants feed and entertain their children during the school holiday.



Lyla Childs, Ellie James and Kaci Childs practice their sewing



Three new faces are becoming familiar to tenants since the arrival of a trio of electrical services experts who have joined the PropertyPlus team.

Dave Simpson, Kieren Cook and William Green have been with us since June and, following a thorough induction process, they are now out-and-about meeting tenants and diagnosing and fixing a range of electrical faults.

Bringing this in-house gives us greater control of the service that was previously provided by Hewers. But it's not the end of our relationship with the external contractor, as their electricians will continue to support us, particularly in delivering the out-of-hours service.

Please give a warm welcome to Dave, Kieren and William if you see them.

Help with diabetes

Over three million people are living with diabetes in England. If the condition is well managed, people can live long and fulfilling lives.

It is important to eat healthily and take regular exercise, as well as carry out regular blood tests to make sure blood glucose levels stay balanced.

We are about to launch a six-week course in Lydney to support our tenants who have diabetes or who care for someone with the condition. The tutor

is a diabetic herself and there will be various demonstrations, discussions, specialist guest speakers, information on nutrition and support available.

The course starts on **11 October** at 10.30am and will be held at the Watermead centre.

If you are interested in going along, please call us on 0800 316 0897 and ask for Penny Mail, in the Community Engagement team.



SAVING TIP

Get the children to make their Xmas cards – a good activity for half-term and cheaper too!



Autumn tea break

h	l	e	a	v	e	s	n	d	s	m	u	d
a	b	t	c	o	p	u	q	n	c	h	a	y
r	o	d	o	l	t	d	o	i	n	d	b	v
v	w	u	r	s	t	k	n	w	r	x	p	n
e	q	b	n	d	u	f	l	i	y	s	l	e
s	q	u	i	r	r	e	l	p	q	w	g	d
t	y	r	r	e	b	k	c	a	l	b	z	l
c	o	n	k	e	r	i	f	n	o	b	o	o
m	x	c	s	t	u	n	t	s	e	h	c	g

Which autumn word is missing from the grid?

Acorn
Blackberry
Bonfire
Chestnuts
Conker

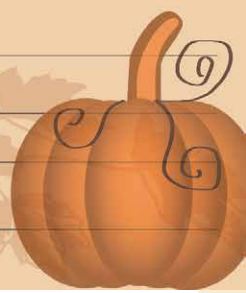
Golden Harvest
Hay
Leaves
Mud

Nuts
Pumpkin
Squirrel
Wind

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel number/email: _____



Congratulations to all those who entered our summer crossword competition because every single entry was correct! They all went into the draw to find a winner and the lucky name pulled out was that of Terry Lister of Aylburton. Well done Terry!

We're doing a wordsearch this time, but with a very important difference – you can **email your answer** to us if you prefer.

There is a list of 14 words underneath the grid, but you should only be able to find 13 of them. When you know which word is missing from the grid you can either **email that word to us**, with your name and address to communications@2rh.org.uk, or you can post your entry form in the usual way:

Communications team
Two Rivers Housing
Cleeve Mill Lane
Newent
Gloucestershire
GL18 1DS

Please send your entry to us by **31 October 2017** and you could win a £15 gift voucher.

Have fun, and good luck!

Otis draws winners



Otis draws the winning entry in our 'My account' competition

Thank you to everyone who entered the competition on our website to launch our new online repairs appointment booking service.

Otis – our Online Tenant Information Service expert – offered a tablet as first prize, and 12 runners-up prizes, in the 'find me' competition in the 'My account' secure tenant area of our website.

We had more than 50 entries and Otis was honoured to draw out the names of the lucky winners, including Paul Stephens of Coleford who won our top prize.

If you haven't yet tried it, next time you need a routine or urgent repair (not an emergency), log on to our website, go to 'My account' and report it – and book the appointment – online. You'll be amazed by how easy it is!

Contact us:

Please tell us if you would like this in large print or on audio CD.

Freephone
0800 316 0897

Email
customerservices@2rh.org.uk

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