

Tenant Topics

Inside
this
issue



New member
of the team
Page 2



Our hands
are helping
Page 9



Home
Truths about
housing
Page 11

Studying for a better family life

Richard and Kate are determined their studies will give them and their family a better life.



"It was a shock to return to the UK and find it impossible to pick up our careers," explained Richard. "My military and teaching background didn't seem to count for much and I realised I had to do something different."

Returning to the UK from overseas left a Joys Green couple struggling to find work. Qualifications weren't recognised in this country and job-hunting was tough when experience didn't carry much weight.

After months of disappointing searches, Kate and Richard Gulliford realised the only way to carve out a positive future for themselves and their two daughters, was to return to the classroom.

So, despite being mature students, juggling jobs and a busy family life, they enrolled on their respective degree courses and are now heading towards qualifications that will enhance their careers, increase their chances of employment and improve all their lives.

Richard is doing a two-year online MSc in International Security and Risk Management and may return to a career in teaching, while Kate is half-way towards her ambition of a degree in youth work. Meanwhile, Richard works full-time and Kate works part-time.

At the end of last year, the determined couple applied for a share of our David Garnett Bursary – designed to improve our tenants' training and skills – and were rewarded with financial and practical help towards their goals.

Kate had lots of work experience, but found a degree was the only way to progress. *"It's hard work juggling all aspects of our lives, but we are showing our children that mum and dad are studying, and that's a really positive message to give to them,"* she said.

Martin joins the team

Gwyn, Rebecca, Martin and Owen make up our Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team.



Martin said *"I've always enjoyed working with people, so it's great to meet Two Rivers tenants and to give them the chance to discuss their issues face-to-face."*

Meet our new Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advisor Martin Beacham, who is really enjoying getting to know Two Rivers tenants.

Martin (back right) has joined us after two decades working for another housing association in a variety of front line roles.

He joins Rebecca James and Gwyn Yarlett as our third Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advisor, supported by Owen Chandler.

Demand has grown for their service so much that we needed another member of the team. In the last three years, the

number of cases dealt with has grown by 40%. Last year they managed just under 500 cases, and achieved almost £1.2 million worth of additional benefits for tenants.



Is your fridge safe?

Fridge and freezer safety has been called into question after consumer organisation 'Which' found 250 products would dramatically accelerate the spread of flames if they caught fire.

Some appliances boasted 'fire-retardant plastic backing' but, when tested, the plastic could not withstand an open flame for more than 30 seconds.

'Which' has issued a 'Don't buy' warning on 45% of fridges, freezers and fridge-freezers reviewed, and found only 14 brands use a flame-retardant metal or aluminium backing on every one of its appliances. These include Beko, Miele, Samsung and LG.

Government figures suggest only 8% of fires caused by faulty appliances were caused by refrigeration equipment and, although it speeds up the spread of

flames, flammable plastic backing is not the cause of fire itself.

None of these products are illegal until fire safety standards are replaced next year, when manufacturers say they will discontinue plastic backing or upgrade the material used at the back of their appliances.

If you are thinking of replacing your fridge or freezer, or you would like to check your existing one, go to www.which.co.uk/news/2018/04/250-fridge-freezers-which-dont-buys-over-fire-safety-concerns to see if it is on the list of appliances issued with a 'Which' safety alert.

A bountiful and delicious home-grown harvest could be yours to share in our new scheme.

New idea bears fruit

Do you love growing your own fruit and veg but don't have room to indulge your hobby? Or maybe your garden is too much for you and you'd be happy if someone else took it on?

We're on a match-making quest, bringing people together to share their

skills, their gardens and the fruits – and vegetables – of their labours.

'Garden share' is a new idea from our Community Engagement team. If you would like to grow your own food but need more space to do it, or you have space in your garden you'd be willing to

let someone else grow fruit or vegetables in, they'd love to hear from you.

Please contact our Community Engagement team on **0800 316 0897** or email **communityengagementteam@2rh.org.uk**.



Eve Waring and Eddie enjoy the luxury of their new heating system.

The heat is on!

Tenants in two Lydney streets are enjoying the warmth and flexibility of their new central heating, after we moved them from electric storage heaters onto gas.

The project at Klondyke Avenue and Steel Avenue has been achieved after we secured a £100,000 grant from the National Grid Warm Homes scheme. A total of 234 bids were submitted nationwide, so we were delighted to be among the 45 successful ones.

Eve and Tom Waring are among the first to benefit. "We were on a key meter before and our night storage heating was expensive," said Mrs Waring. "Being warm is very important to us. We lived in Spain for over 10 years before moving back to the Forest of Dean, so it is wonderful to now have the flexibility to have the heating on or off whenever we like. You just don't get that with night storage heating.

"I don't drink or smoke, so it is my luxury! We have noticed a considerable difference in the warmth, and being able to have a gas hob for cooking is also a bonus."

We expect all the tenants converting to gas will also see a welcome reduction in their energy bills.

The project has been delivered in partnership with PH Jones, Warm Wales (Integrated Energy Solutions) and Wales and West.

SAVING TIP

Always compare the cost of renewing your home, car and travel insurance, plus your energy, phone, TV and broadband suppliers. Loyalty is rarely rewarded, and you usually save money by switching. It's so quick and easy to do online.





Ethal Ford and Jean Osborne share their memories of Newent in days gone by.

Sharing memories

We held our first 'Memories of Newent' event last month, paving the way for two hours of reminiscence about the changes and developments that have taken place in the town over the years.

The event was led by the Barnwood Trust and is the second of its kind, following a similar session in Lydney.

Residents and tenants from the local community enjoyed sharing old photos, books and stories as well as a cup of tea and a piece of cake!

They learned about the American soldiers based in Newent during the Second World War and were reminded that the owner of a well-known store which sold sweets and general groceries was an Italian prisoner of war. There was a lot of chatter and laughter as memories were shared and expanded on within the group.

Julie Burlow, our Community Engagement Team Leader, said: *"It was so very interesting to hear stories of*

Newent through the years. We had a range of Robert Bisco's photographs which prompted memories about some of the buildings in the town and their various uses over the years."

There has been so much change to Newent over the years, it is important to also preserve the past and to appreciate its heritage. We are very much looking forward to the next session.

We've got gold!

We have secured our first Gold Medal from renowned safety organisation RoSPA, rewarding five consecutive years of top results.

This shows that working practice standards are being maintained year-after-year and is testament to the hard work and sustained efforts of all our staff in helping to keep tenants, employees, contractors and members of the public safe.

The RoSPA Safety Awards are a much sought-after accolade and we have consistently earned the Gold Award. News of the Gold Medal comes after judges assessed our health and safety systems and practices, such as leadership and involvement of the staff.

Garry King, our Chief Executive said: *"The Gold Medal indicates a continuing and excellent performance. It is important for us to achieve high*

standards, but it's absolutely vital we maintain them over the long term, and we have achieved that by putting robust processes and procedures in place that are strictly adhered to, and monitored.

"Our staff deserve the recognition and praise earned by this award and they are to be congratulated."



Local pride blossoms

Leighton Wright, one of our Centigen operatives, is now using his own time to work with neighbours to improve the look of their street in Aylburton.

There's a beautiful brook running through it and residents have come together to plant bulbs and wild flowers along the banks and put flower boxes at the start of the road.

"I am happy to spend a couple of hours keeping the grass cut and the verges tidy", said Leighton. "We have lots of wildlife around here, including a Kingfisher, owls, lots of different wild birds, fish in the brook and plenty of other animals and insects."

"The whole street keeps its gardens to a high standard and everyone was keen to be involved with improving this pretty area. It is an on-going project and our children are loving taking part too. We may even enter competitions in the future and show off our rural beauty spot."



Leighton is proud of his neighbourhood.



Like hot cakes!

Demand has been high for our new development on the edge of Tewkesbury, with the first group of homes being quickly snapped up.

We are taking a total of 105 of the Bloor Homes properties over the next two years, and we expect to be handing keys to new residents – both Shared Ownership and affordable rent – every single month.

The Shared Ownership homes on this popular Wheatpieces site are being managed through our estate agency TwoCan, and you can see them on their website, www.twocan.estate.

Payment bridges the gap

Universal Credit is steadily affecting more and more of our tenants, as their circumstances change and they move to the new payment system.

Nearly 250 people who live in a Two Rivers home are now either on Universal Credit, or are in the process of moving onto it.

And there's better news for anyone who receives Housing Benefit and is currently waiting for their Universal Credit application to be considered, as they will now receive two weeks' worth of housing payment, to help reduce the financial pressure felt moving from the old system to the new.

This 'Transition to UC Housing Payment' or 'two-week run-on' is to help with any arrears already built up, or incurred whilst waiting for the first Universal Credit payment to come through. However, this does not mean rent payments can be reduced.

If you have any questions about Universal Credit, please look at www.gov.uk/universal-credit, or www.tworivershousing.org.uk or call our Income Collection team on **0800 316 0897**.



Change at the top



The hospitable residents at Ryelands in Bream treated Jon (front left) – and Garry – to a home-made lunch at their community centre, to wish Jon well in his retirement.

Staff and tenants bade fond farewell to our Director Jon Coe recently, when he retired after 15 years at Two Rivers.

Jon worked in housing for more than four decades, spending most of his career in Birmingham where he started out as a management trainee. In 2003 he joined us to help lead the new

organisation, taking on the homes from Forest of Dean District Council.

“This was a huge challenge, but it was an exciting time and a great opportunity,” explained Jon. “The last 15 years have been an immensely rewarding time for me, rounding off with our most recent excellent Top 100 position.”

Jon was delighted to be invited to a farewell lunch by residents at Ryelands in Bream just before he left us to tackle a long list of home improvements prepared by his wife Rita! He was, however, still hoping for time to follow his beloved Aston Villa and to learn to play the guitar.

Peter Stoate, who currently works at Solihull Community Housing, steps into Jon's shoes at the end of June. With a background in housing and commercial business, he will be helping to steer our housing services and our profit-for-purpose activities, Centigen Facilities Management and TwoCan estate agency.

Peter Stoate, our new Corporate Director of Operations.



New data rules

New rules on how people's personal information is used came into force in May, under the General Data Protection Regulation – or GDPR.

These changes are more stringent than the previous Data Protection Act and make organisations accountable for the information they hold, and how they use it.

We have introduced a new system to make sure any personal information we hold about you is stored and processed

appropriately, and you can read about this in our Privacy Notice, which is on our website. You'll find it on the Home page and in the 'Library' section.

If you have any questions about how we manage our data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer by emailing **dpo@2rh.org.uk**.



Susan's a winner!

Susan Hodges is the first winner of our new monthly prize draw for people using our online repairs booking system in 'My account'.

The Coleford mum has used it several times, but it was her latest plumbing job that clinched the £25 prize after her name was chosen at random from all those who logged a repair online during April.

Susan booked her winning appointment on a Saturday – when the office is closed – and chose the following Wednesday for the plumber to call, scheduling it around her work commitments.

Monday is the busiest day for our Customer Services team, which can leave callers waiting a little longer for the phone to be answered, but



Andrew Smith, Customer Services Manager, presents Susan Hodges with her voucher.

Susan avoided all that by choosing to book the appointment online at **www.tworivershousing.org.uk/myaccount**

"I find it quicker than ringing up," explained Susan. "I think some people may feel a bit nervous about using it, but it's really easy to use."

SAVING TIP

Look for free festivals to entertain the family. You'll find craft fairs and even food festivals that let you enter for free (and it's likely there will be free samples too!).



Local cancer support

Macmillan Cancer Support is running an event on 21 June to find out what services people need in the Forest of Dean.

They're hoping people who have experienced cancer themselves, or have supported people with cancer – either as a family member, friend, volunteer or professional – will share their thoughts and ideas.

There will also be workshops exploring how to effectively support someone with cancer covering areas like signposting, having difficult conversations, and looking after yourself.

The event runs from 10am to 2pm at Great Oaks Hospice, and lunch will be provided. To find out more, or to book a place, please call **07866 202537**.

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

Winner!

Book your repair online through 'My account'
£25 prize draw every month
www.tworivershousing.org.uk/myaccount

Two Rivers Housing Disability and Carers Forum

- Do you live with a disability or care for someone with a disability?
- Do you feel alone and unsupported?

Why not join this forum?

- ▶ We meet six times a year.
- ▶ Find out about the different services available.
- ▶ Meet new friends who will understand.

For more information please contact the Community Engagement Team on 0800 316 0897 or email communityengagementteam@2rh.org.uk



What do you think?

We are considering reducing the size of our Board from nine members to seven to make us more cost-effective – and we'd like to know what you think of our proposal.

We would achieve this by having one less tenant member and one less independent member – but would make certain the remaining Board members have the mix of skills and experience we need to run effectively.

We would also still have opportunities for tenants to be involved with our work in other ways, such as our Resident Scrutiny Group and Tenant Forum. (You'll find a complete list on the 'Getting involved' page of our website.)

It is important we consult with you over this proposal and give you the chance to ask questions and tell us your views, before the Board makes a final decision.



You can do this by:

Letter – write to our usual address and add **Freepost RTHC-AERZ-XAHE** on the envelope so you don't need a stamp.

Phone – call Anthea Tawney on **01531 829269**

Email – send to

executivepatteam@2rh.org.uk

Please let us have your comments by **Wednesday 1 August 2018.**



United in Silver

Congratulations to United Living, which has scooped a Silver award for the way it manages our kitchen and bathroom contract.

The award comes from the national Considerate Constructors organisation, which reviewed the evidence provided by the company

in five different categories to make its assessment of how it manages our projects.

Our Surveyor Jenny Lamb (centre right) joined Philip Lovell, Sacha Hutcheson and Nic Carn at a presentation ceremony where the team learned of its success.

Snap-happy!

If you're a keen amateur photographer who likes to get out and about taking pictures for fun, and would like to do this in the company of others, you could meet up with the Bream Snappers.

This group of enthusiasts meets every Tuesday afternoon to visit pretty local places, take photographs and share a cup of tea. Some members have mobility problems, and like to feel safe by going out with a group.

The group meets at Ryelands Centre in Bream at 2pm every Tuesday, and, if the weather is fine, they're ready to go out and see what they can find!

Tenants and non-tenants are all welcome. They've just set up a Facebook page if you'd like to get in touch, or call Penny in our Community Engagement team to find out more.



Jasmine Ellicott, Susan Whitworth, Matt Howland, Anthea Tawney and Luke Warren tackle a variety of tasks at the Orchard Trust.



Our hands are helping

Our 2018 Helping Hands volunteering project is well underway, with teams of staff helping community projects throughout the local area.

If you've noticed the black railings at the Thomas Blake Memorial Gardens in Ross are looking particularly fine and shiny, it's partly thanks to a group of our colleagues who spent a day helping regular volunteers to spruce them up.

Another group spent the day at the Orchard Trust in Lydbrook doing a variety of gardening tasks and looking after the resident goats.

Every member of staff is given a day for volunteering activity each year as part of our commitment to 'supporting communities' and we are always looking out for local projects to support.

Please call us on **0800 316 0897** and ask to speak to a member of the Executive PA team, if you know a project where we could help.

Claire Knight, our Head of HR (front right), gets handy with a paintbrush helping Blake Memorial Garden volunteers Nicky, Rob and Caroline to smarten the railings.



Free training support

We've teamed up with the local Adult Education team to increase the opportunities for our tenants to learn new skills.

Adult Education is focusing its efforts on strengthening facilities in the Forest – and particularly some of the more rural areas – and wants to help people improve their chances of finding work or changing their job.

This might be by offering family learning, free workshops, improving literacy and numeracy skills, writing a CV, searching for jobs, or learning techniques for growing confidence and motivation, for instance.

If you, a friend or relative, would benefit from help to learn or refresh some skills that would be a springboard into work, or maybe you would appreciate

SAVING TIP

Pay by Direct Debit where you can. Once set up you don't have to remember to pay, and it spreads the cost over the year.



advice on setting up your own business, please tell a member of our Community Engagement team, and they will pass your ideas onto their colleagues in Adult Education.

for you -for your community - not for profit

Helping you to get along

Not everyone can get along with everyone else, all of the time. Life is just like that.

We want our tenants to live comfortably alongside their neighbours and, happily, many local disputes can be sorted out

with a calm word or a handshake over the garden fence.

However, arguments can boil over, and that's when we might be able to step in to help broker a solution.

The key for us is whether or not a tenant has breached the terms of their tenancy agreement, and we need firm evidence of the aggravating behaviour which, these days, can often be captured on film or audio.

Hopefully our two Tenancy Compliance Officers, Angeline and Julia, will be able to help find an agreed way forward – perhaps with the help of the Police or other agencies – but, if they need to pursue a legal route, it will take much longer and the evidence becomes even more crucial to the success of a case.

Drugs issues or other suspected criminal activity should always be reported to the Police in the first instance.

Please contact our Tenancy Compliance team on **0800 316 0897** if you need advice or support.

Julia and Angeline are here to help our tenants be good neighbours.



Free family festival

Two Rivers is one of the sponsors of Coleford Music Festival in July, and the event promises to be a fantastic free family day out.

The two-day event, over the weekend of 14 and 15 July, offers workshops for children and young people, a festival market promoting local goods and services, musical and arts performances and activities run by community groups.

Local musicians will showcase their talents and there will be stalls from local food producers, helping to promote the Forest of Dean and the Coleford area, in particular.

Make a date in your diary and take a look at **www.colefordmusicfestival.co.uk** for more information.

Lavatory blues



Blue toilet tablets are turning everything blue – and that includes our plumbers, too!

These tablets which drop into the tank or bowl are, not only staining everything they come into contact with – clothes, floors, walls and fingers – but they are also damaging the toilet cistern parts due to the long-term build-up of harmful sediment.

Instead, we recommend a small squirt of bleach around the pan every now and again, or perhaps a cleaning tablet which hangs on the rim of the toilet pan. Whatever you do, please avoid putting anything into the cistern, at all.

SAVING TIP

Check if your supermarket loyalty points can give you money off at attractions.



More homes are needed if we are to meet demand and bring down the cost of housing.

Home Truths about housing

The average price of a home in Gloucestershire is nearly £280,000 – 10 times average earnings. In the Forest, it's £225,000 – more than eight times average income.

With low wages, high unemployment, a shortage of affordable properties, and increasing food and energy prices, many people struggle to buy their own home.

Those who choose to rent privately face monthly payments of nearly £800 (£600 in the Forest) – more than one-third (nearly a quarter in the Forest) of their income.

The alternative is waiting for a lower-cost housing association home to become available. However, there are just 30,000 of them to rent in the county (5,200 in the Forest) and long waiting lists.

These figures come from the latest National Housing Federation's 'Home Truths' report which looks at housing demand, supply and affordability.

"There is a yawning gap between people's earnings and borrowing capacity and the cost of getting a mortgage or renting a home privately," said Garry King, our Chief Executive.

"There's also a chronic shortage of homes of all types. We are committed to building at least 1,000 quality homes over the next 10 years that will meet the needs of people of all ages, and we will do more if we can."



**Home
Truths
2017/18**

Sporting freedom

Freedom Leisure centres across the Forest are offering a variety of sporting activities, designed to suit all ages and abilities.

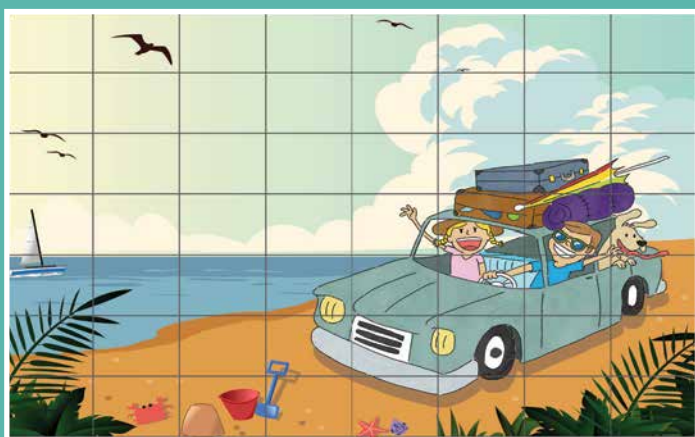
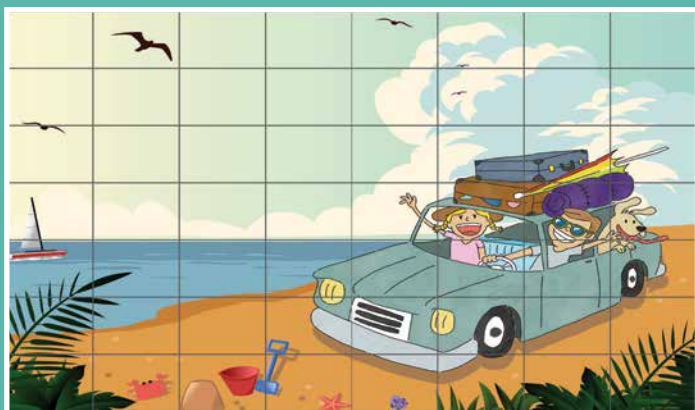
Some are offered at discounted prices, and people aged 50 and over will qualify for free swimming at Newent if they use the Newent Community Transport route bus to get there and back.

Badminton, swimming, walking netball and football, plus boccia, tennis, football and golf are available on different days and times at the Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney and Newent centres.

Contact your local centre, or visit their website – www.freedom-leisure.co.uk – for more information.



Can you spot the 10 differences?



Grid
references

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel number/email: _____

Summer tea break



The wordsearch in our spring issue of Tenant Topics was popular with readers and Mrs Wintle of Lydney did well to be drawn as our winner, amongst all the other correct entries. Thanks to everyone who took part – online and by post.

This time we're making a welcome return to 'spot-the-difference', with a seasonal picture to get you in the mood for summer!

There are 10 differences between the two pictures – some of which are easier to find than others. Find them all and write down the grid references in the box provided. If you're entering online, just email us with those 10 grid references to be entered in the prize draw.

There's a £15 gift voucher for the first correct entry to be drawn after **31 July**. But whether you win or not, we hope you will enjoy searching for the differences!

Send your entry to:

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

Or email communications@2rh.org.uk

Thank you David

We have just said thank you and goodbye to our Chair, David Powell, who has stepped down after nearly nine years on our Board.

David's position on the Board is now taken by Tim Jackson, who was co-opted at the end of last year, but John

Bloxsum is Interim Chair until the autumn, when Yvonne Leishman takes on the role permanently. You can see more information about our Board members within the 'About us' section of our website.



Here are David (centre left) and John (centre right) at a recent event to wish Jon Coe (centre) a happy retirement. They are flanked by Garry King, Chief Executive (left) and Barry Thompson, Corporate Director of Resources (right).

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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