Tenant Topics

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Helping at the orchard

A day of weeding, mulching and painting kept five pairs of Helping Hands from Two Rivers Housing busy at the Berry Hill Community Orchard.

The orchard is run by a group of volunteers who have created a beautiful, tranquil spot for all to enjoy – but they're always grateful for extra help.

Every member of staff from the Two Rivers Housing group takes a day out of their normal duties each year to volunteer at a community or charitable project. This particular team comprised colleagues from Customer Services, Income Collection, Lettings, Communications and Centigen.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all at Two Rivers Housing



The Helping Hands team from Two Rivers Housing weeding — under the direction of Jo Revill (centre right) from the Community Orchard.

Liz Reeson, Communications Manager, explained: "Helping Hands is a great way to learn about local projects, and do something completely different from my day-job. A group of us can make a big difference in just a few hours, and that's really satisfying."

Jo Revill, one of the Community Orchard volunteers said: "We are always extremely grateful for any help we receive. The orchard looks amazing and I know how much effort it has taken and with continued good cheer! Thank you also to Two Rivers for supplying materials for the day to enable jobs, such as the staining, to be completed."

Over the next few weeks we're helping school pupils with job interview practice, a local foodbank with collecting and sorting donations and a children's charity to prepare for its Christmas fayre. We're always looking for suggestions of local projects we can support through Helping Hands. If you have any ideas, please email helpinghands@2rh.org.uk







A popular Parkside resident said his last 'farewell' in style as a motorcycle and

side car carried him to this funeral.

It was a fitting closure to the life of 105-year-old David Braby, who was still riding his motorcycle beyond his 100th birthday.

As Scheme Co-ordinator Tim Gwilliam pointed out, David was born when King George V was on the throne, he lived through the Great Depression, the Wall Street Crash and two World Wars.

David makes his final journey in appropriate style!

Our Chief Executive Garry King and Scheme Co-ordinator Elaine Hill shared David's 100th birthday celebrations in 2013.



He also witnessed "the comings and goings of more prime ministers than you can shake a stick at and even a fairly ordinary thing like making a phone call would have changed dramatically in his 105 years", said Tim.

Housing in Herefordshire

A new process of applying for affordable housing in Herefordshire will be introduced in the spring.

At the moment applicants use HomePoint, but this will be replaced with more modern and user-friendly online platforms that will be available from March.

You will register with Herefordshire Council's new system to ensure the right priority is given to your housing need, and you will continue to be able to choose the properties you like. The council's system will then appropriately share that information with the other online platforms available, and property will be allocated according to your choice and need.

The current system remains in place until the new one is ready to launch, and further information will be provided before it goes live.

More to join UC in 2019

More people are expected to join Universal Credit early next year, as the next tranche of changes are introduced.

Starting in February, people who are responsible for three or more children will move onto the new system if they make a new claim or report a change of circumstances.

Universal Credit (UC) replaces the following benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit

You should only make a claim for UC if advised by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), JobCentre or local authority (council), but please check if you have any doubt about this before applying.

You will find more information about UC at www.gov.uk/universal-credit.



Please contact our Income Collection Team on **0800 316 0897** when you make your claim for UC, to discuss how this affects paying your rent.

(UC is subject to change and this information is correct at the time of going to print.)



Beat the blues!

When the sparkle of Christmas has faded away, January can seem like a gloomy prospect – but it doesn't have to be that way.

If you'd like to beat the winter blues and start the new year in a positive way, you might find what you're looking for at a free taster day.

Whether you want to exercise your body or your mind, there are lots of opportunities to get stuck into a new activity and there are two free events at Lydney Community Centre where you can find out what's on offer.

- Saturday 26 January 10am 4pm.
 Family day.
- Wednesday 30 January 1 4pm.

Representatives from Freedom Leisure, Adult Education, FRED (improve your reading and writing skills), GreenSquare and ourselves will be among the many organisations taking part and hoping to inspire!

So, 'Don't be blue; do something new'.

SAVING TIP

Plan now for next Xmas.
Set up an account and put a
regular sum away each week or
month. No matter how small, it will
help you pay for next year.



A close shave

Denise Stuart will have definitely felt the chill, after shaving her head on one of the coldest autumn days.

Despite the frost on the ground, Denise, who lives in Bream, honoured her pledge and faced the clippers to raise money for the special care baby units in Gloucester and Bristol. Her great-granddaughter Rosie really benefited from this specialist care when she was born prematurely in the summer, and this was Denise's way of thanking them.

Her efforts – which included a raffle – raised more than £600, so well done Denise, and everyone who supported her.

Frozen pipes

Many of us will be hoping we don't have a repeat of last winter's bitterly cold weather but, if we do, we should all be better prepared following our recent experience.

Most of the emergency calls during the big freeze were from tenants saying their heating had failed and, in the majority of cases, this was because the condensate pipe to their boiler had frozen.

This is actually relatively simple to fix and just requires help to speed up the thawing process. Some hot water, a hairdryer or hot water bottle used on the pipe will usually be enough to melt the frozen water inside and get the boiler working again – quicker than we would be able to despatch an engineer.

There are lots of videos on YouTube showing how this is done and you will

find a couple of links on our website if you go to the page under 'Your home/ Looking after your home/Self-help/Your heating'.



Little litterpickers

Freya and Leah Jones got busy with a litter-picker as they joined in a community effort to clean up the area where they live.

Neighbourhood Housing Advisor Kathryn Hamilton organised several events around our properties in Newent and Gloucester during half-term week to give the chance for younger residents to be involved.

They really enjoyed their role and will now be carrying out regular patrols – hopefully supported by their family, friends and neighbours – to keep the area around their homes neat and tidy.

Keep up the good work, everyone!



Social housing is vital

Safe and secure homes are a top priority for many Two Rivers tenants, and they think the Government should spend more on social housing than helping people to buy their own homes.

These findings emerged from several consultation events designed to see what our tenants thought of the Green Paper on social housing, published in the summer

Members of our Residents' Scrutiny Group, Tenants' Forum and Disability and Carers' Forum were asked for their views, and we also spoke to visitors to our Holiday Club.

Key comments included:

- 88% said their home is safe, secure and warm
- 94% thought the Government should focus more on providing social and affordable homes, rather than home ownership, although 88% thought

more low-cost options should be available to help people to buy.

- 50% thought the proposed national league tables of social housing would improve services, although there was concern that they would not necessarily give a true local picture or properly indicate customer service.
- 34% believe in life-long tenancies, but 47% thought they should be reviewed individually.
- There was a strong feeling that social housing is vital, but they want to reduce stigma and see everyone treated fairly and equally.
- Tenants want to feel safe and secure where they live, and for communities to work together.

Thank you to everyone who gave their comments, which have been fed into the national consultation.

Tea dance

We're celebrating Valentine's Day with a special Tea Dance at Lydney Town Hall.

It's on **Friday 15 February**, between 2 and 4pm, and all tenants are invited. There's no charge, but please call our Community Engagement team to book your place.

Top marks

We have been awarded the top possible rating from our regulator, following a rigorous assessment.

The Regulator of Social Housing is responsible for making sure tenants and assets are protected, services represent value-for-money and housing associations are properly run. Its 'In Depth Assessment' is the housing sector's equivalent of an Ofsted, testing leadership strength and financial viability.

The assessment was carried out over the summer and we were delighted to be awarded top marks – G1/V1 (Governance/Viability) – putting us among the top housing associations in the country.

"This is a crucial result for us as there is no higher endorsement in our sector," said Garry King, Chief Executive. "It should also give great confidence to our tenants, customers and partners to know that we have been through the

most rigorous testing – and passed with flying colours."





Dave Harvey was so impressed with his newly-improved home, he turned to verse to express his delight with the sparkling result.

The poem praised the workmanship and friendliness of our contractors in the United Living team, and described how

the brand new kitchen and bathroom had transformed his home and improved his life.

"I'm over the moon!" said Dave, who lives in Parkend. "I love it, love it, love it!"

Dave's poem

United Living, what a crew They are top class, for the work they do. They always greet you with a smile! Get on with the job, this is their style!

My kitchen it was in a state You should see it now, what they create. A place where I can do my chores, Tiles all around, with laminate floors.

Drawers with units on the wall Transformed the room, I thank you all! Mick the boss with Sacha too, Six skilled men, to make this crew!

I also have a wet room Where my bathroom used to be. I have a walk-in shower now, Oh how this pleases me!

New toilet, sink and radiator With handles on the wall Which I grab hold with both hands If I fear I'm going to fall!

So thanks United Living With your hard-working crew. Thanks Two Rivers Housing For the funding which you do!

Hot topic

Our IT courses are so popular we now have a waiting list, ready to offer places to those who wish to expand their knowledge or learn new skills.

Whether a complete beginner or an enthusiastic novice, you will be very welcome. All equipment will be provided.

If you would like to take advantage of this free computer training, please do get in touch and, if the course you're interested in is fully booked, we'll put you on the list for the next one.

Our first 10-week courses of the new year both start on Friday 11 January. They are:

- Café 31, Cinderford, 10.15am 12.15pm.
- Lydney Community Centre, Naas Lane, 1.00 – 3.00pm. (Basic laptop skills.)

For more information, please contact Penny or Julie in our Community Engagement team by email

communityengagementteam@2rh. org.uk or call 0800 316 0897.

Scam warning

Forest of Dean District Council is warning residents to be wary of bogus callers from a company claiming to be working on behalf of the council.

Callers advise residents that the Council Tax banding on their property may be too high and offer to reduce it for a fee. They then ask for personal information, including bank details. The council stresses it would never use a third party to contact a taxpayer in this way. Anybody receiving a call like this should end the call immediately, without providing any personal information over the phone, especially bank details.

If in doubt, please call the council on **01594 810000** and ask to speak to a member of the Council Tax team.





Susan Reddan (left) and Mary Davis enjoy a cuppa at George Place in Berry Hill.



Sweet rewards for charity



Paul Howell with his granddaughter Rosalie and daughter Abbie with the cake they made for the event at Worcester Road, Cinderford.

Tenants and staff were joined by the whole community in raising more than £1,300 for Macmillan Cancer Support.

It was a tremendous effort from those buying drinks, cakes, raffle and tombola tickets and taking part in competitions at six of our sites, all united in supporting a cause close to many people's hearts.

Tenants at five housing schemes raised £1,176 – Willowdean (£83) and Hilldean/Worcester Road (£523) in Cinderford, Tufthorn Close in Coleford (£100), Wynols Close in Broadwell (£100) and

George Place in Berry Hill (£370) – while staff at our Newent office raised a further £156

Ann Pugh, our HomePlus Scheme Co-ordinator who led fundraising activities at Hilldean/Worcester Road, said: "This was a fantastic effort from staff, tenants and the community right across the Forest, giving their support to a brilliant cause that affects so many people. 'Supporting communities' is an important part of what Two Rivers does, and this shows how good we are at coming together to help others."

Getting tough on safety

We take our tenants' safety extremely seriously, which is why we're going to take a tougher line on accessing your home for essential health and safety works.

'Essential works' includes, but is not limited to, the servicing of heating and electrical systems, repairs and removal works.

When you signed your tenancy agreement, you committed to allow

Two Rivers Housing and its contractors entry to your home to complete these works. Failure to do so is considered a breach of that agreement.

Our contractors will tell us to start enforcement action if they are denied access on two consecutive visits. From now on, if we do not hear from you, we will send a third and final letter. If you fail to provide access on this occasion, we will ask the court to issue a warrant giving us entry into your home.

Please contact us to rearrange an appointment

if you have been issued with a time that is not convenient, but we do need a minimum of 24 hours' notice.

These essential works are required to keep tenants, our properties, neighbouring properties and the whole community safe so please help us to do this. Thank you.



Sisters Tia and Phoebe Walding tuck into a tasty lunch at our latest Holiday Club held in Cinderford during October half-term.

A delicious meal of chilli con carne and banana loaf were provided by our friends at The Wiggly Worm charity, and the children enjoyed games, crafts, reading and the ever-popular face-painting.

Our next free Holiday Club will be held on **20 February**, so reserve the date now and keep an eye on our Facebook and Twitter pages for more information. "It's great to have events like these during the half-term break; we've been to a few of them in the past. It gets the children out and mixing with others. My grandchildren have had a lovely couple of hours. Many thanks Two Rivers."

Beware of the sharks!

The countdown to Christmas has begun and, if you're thinking of turning to a payday lender to get you through it, we would urge you to think again.

Companies such as Provident, Sunny, QuickQuid and Brighthouse tempt customers with quick and easy cash, but they generally charge such high interest rates that they increase your stress rather than solving your money troubles.

Illegal loan sharks can have the same effect. They may start off friendly, but they can resort to threats, violence and intimidation when they don't get their money. Some even ask for items such as passports or bank cards and PIN details as security.

If you need to find some extra money, our Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team can guide you to reputable services and support. They will urge you to check fees, charges, interest rates and terms and conditions before agreeing to any loan, and to check the lender is legal and registered by searching the Financial Services Register (https://register.fca.org.uk/).

Please take great care if you're thinking of borrowing money, and talk to us first if you have any concerns about the lender.



New award

Our housing scheme at King's Lodge in Cinderford has picked up a regional award from the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

The award recognises the development's 'outstanding contribution to the environment and local communities'.

Kier Partnership built 92 homes on the site, and we took 37 of them for rent and Shared Ownership, supporting the regeneration of a redundant industrial site and helping to breathe new life into the town

SAVING TIP

Cook a bit extra for your main meal and save some for lunch — or freeze it for another day when money might be tight.



90 years young!

Two of our tenants have recently celebrated their 90th birthdays with their closest friends, family and neighbours.

Lena Short was treated to a birthday party at George Place in Berry Hill, complete with a balloon and a plentiful supply of tea and cake.

Over at Ryelands in Bream, friends made a fuss of Barry Phillips as he celebrated his milestone birthday, and he was joined at a special lunch by Two Rivers staff Penny Mail, Rachel Smith and Peter Stoate.

Congratulations to Lena and Barry!



Thanks for the memories

Our reminiscence events are proving incredibly popular, with the benefits being felt by young and old alike.

Students from The Dean Academy in Lydney were among those who enjoyed an afternoon chatting with tenants and local historians about their recollections of yesteryear.

"It's lovely to see the children enjoying the memories of the older generation," said Penny Mail, Community Engagement Advisor. "Everyone gets something out of these events and we appreciate the effort made by those involved."



These activities are increasingly important in helping to reduce the impact of loneliness and isolation, and they're a great way for the generations

to mix and share stories. If you would like to be involved, please contact our Community Engagement team.

Join our research

We're surrounded by technology every day, and so much of it can help in our homes.

We're looking for tenants who would like to join a research project to see what – if any – would be useful to us.

We intend to trial:

 a monitor which sends a message directly to the engineer if your boiler identifies a problem. It diagnoses it and tells the engineer what's needed to fix it, before a major problem occurs (eg burst/frozen pipes, low pressure warnings, interrupted gas supply) making sure you're not left without heating or hot water when you need it most.

- a device that converts smoke and CO detectors into smart devices. This will recognise a false alarm and alert you to a potential real issue. If there's a fault, the device will automatically tell our Customer Service team.
- humidity sensors that tell us if there's a ventilation or condensation issue.

 a sensor which gives an accurate reading of the temperature in the room where it is fitted, rather than the thermostat in your hall, helping to manage heating costs.

You will need wi-fi but, apart from that, you just need to allow us to fit the relevant meter and use the anonymised data to analyse the benefits and decide if it is something we might introduce more widely.

If you would like to know more, please email **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** or call **0800 316 0897** to register your interest.

Helping to feed those in need

Two Rivers staff have donated the equivalent of over 400 meals to help local people struggling to feed themselves and their families.

The items were gifted at a 'harvest festival' themed event, when everyone was asked to bring a contribution for The Forest Foodbank and Lord's Larder. The 120 people who attended brought more than 700 individual items.



Amelia Revill and Joe Chew from Two Rivers Housing deliver donations to the Rev Simon Mason (centre) for the Lord's Larder.



"We were overwhelmed by the generosity of our staff," said Amelia Revill, HR Assistant who helped to coordinate the collection. "This is a cause which is very close to our hearts as so many of our tenants benefit from the great work of the local foodbanks."

The Forest Foodbank has seen a 30% increase in demand in the last 12 months, with an 11% increase in donations. It believes much of this can be attributed to the introduction of Universal Credit.

Tina Gray, Foodbank Manager at The Forest Foodbank, said: "The Two Rivers

contribution was enough to provide approximately 200 meals for our clients. As we are experiencing high demands on our services, this donation was especially well received. I would like to say a massive 'thank you' to Two Rivers staff for their generosity."

The Rev Simon Mason, vicar at St Mary's Church in Newent which runs Lord's Larder, said: "We are extremely grateful for this donation of food. It means we can help more of those who come to us. Our aim is that noone should go hungry."

Asbestos surveys

We have just begun an exercise to update the information we hold about asbestos in our properties.

A company called DMW will be checking inside and outside more than 550 homes to see if there is any asbestos present, which will help to reduce delays when we come to make improvements.

The survey is a legal requirement and we are therefore looking for your cooperation in making and keeping your appointment with DMW. The survey will take no more than one hour to complete.

DMW surveyors working on our behalf will all carry clear identification but, if you are in any doubt about their authenticity, please call us on **0800 316 0897** to check.



Congratulations to the residents of St Bartholomews in Newent for picking up not one, not two, but five awards from the judging team at Newent in Bloom.

Their individual efforts were rewarded with one Bronze and four Highly Commended when the winners were

announced at the Newent Onion Fayre in September.

Well done to all – whose efforts are particularly commendable given the long, hot, rain-free summer, which must have made this an even greater challenge.

Our HomePlus team

We've had a bit of a change-around of responsibilities and areas covered by our team of HomePlus scheme co-ordinators.

The diagram below shows Fiona Stewart and Elaine Hill heading up their respective teams (north and south), the scheme co-ordinators within each team, and which area they cover.



Fiona Stewart - Senior Scheme Co-ordinator - North

· Whittington Walk, Newent



Paul Gale

- Johnstone Close, Staunton
- · Western Way, Dymock
- Worrall Hill
- Mitcheldean



Ann Pugh

- · Hilldean, Cinderford
- Drybrook
- Glebe Rd, Church Rd and St Bartholomew's, Newent



Gina Facchiano

- Ruardean
- · Rowandean, Cinderford
- · Coombe Drive, Cinderford
- Penby Lawn, Newnham



Marianne Roy

- · Oakway, Littledean
- · Willowdean, Cinderford
- Ryelands, Bream (south)



Mary Johnson

- · Crawshay Place, Cinderford
- · Kensley Vale, Cinderford
- Drybrook

Elaine Hill - Senior Scheme Co-ordinator - South

· Meads Close, Coleford

Tim Gwilliam

- · Parkside, Coleford
- · The Horsepool, Berry Hill
- · Worcester Walk, Mile End

Julie Shingles

- · Wynols Close, Broadwell
- · Tufthorn Close, Coleford
- Eastbourne Crescent, Coleford

Sharon Woodroffe

- · George Place, Berry Hill
- Deanholme, Mile End
- · Danby Rd/Close, Yorkley

Claire Carter

- · The Springs, Lydney
- · Watermead, Lydney
- Buttington Estate, Sedbury

Karen Weaver

- Klondyke Avenue and Steel Avenue, Lydney
- · Buttington Estate, Sedbury













Make sure you're covered



Two Rivers insures the building you live in, but does not insure your possessions.

We strongly recommend you buy your own contents insurance, to give you financial support and peace of mind in the event of an accident (eg breakage, spillage, flood) or criminal act (eg burglary).

Insurance can cost less than £1 per week and we suggest you shop around for the best deal for you. You could consider a scheme we offer, which is underwritten by Allianz Insurance plc. We will add the cost to your rent account, so that you pay it at the same time.

You should also be aware that we may consider recharging you the £2,500 excess imposed by our insurers if you damage your home deliberately, or as a result of negligence. For example, carelessly discarding a cigarette and causing a fire.

We would only do this if we had clear evidence it happened because you (or a family member or visitor) was negligent, but it is a reminder to please take care to prevent accidents from happening.

If you would like more information about contents insurance, please give us a call or look on our website under 'Your home/Money matters/Contents insurance.

SAVING TIP

Make 2019 the year when you shop around for all your insurance and utilities.
You could save hundreds of pounds, and it's so easy to do online.



Changes to our Board

Our Board has recently slimmed down from nine members to seven and we have a new Chair at the helm.

Yvonne Leishman has taken over at the head of the Board, supported by Vice-Chair John Bloxsom, who had been standing in as Interim Chair since the spring.

The change took place at the Annual Members' Meeting in October, when we also said goodbye and thank you to two departing members – Alan Blundell (independent member) and Christopher Hillidge (tenant member).

We now have six independent members and one tenant member, all of whom provide valuable strategic direction and scrutiny of our performance and we are grateful for the time they give us. You can see who they are on our website – under 'About us/Our Board'.

Homes going up

We are currently building nearly 300 new homes right across Gloucestershire – from Lydney to Newent, and Tewkesbury to Tetbury.

There are 12 different schemes under construction. Most offer between 10 and 20 homes, but the very popular Wheatpieces development in Tewkesbury will give us 104 properties when it's complete.

We are also moving into three Cotswolds towns for the first time, working with local councils and developers to build in areas most in need of affordable homes.

All the homes will be available for either affordable rent or Shared Ownership.

SAVING TIP

Take advantage of the January sales to buy Christmas cards and decorations for next year, and maybe some birthday gifts, too.



Bream Snappers have been enjoying a bit of a flutter – using butterflies to learn how to get the best out of their cameras.

The photography group took a recent trip to the butterfly zoo at Symonds Yat and, with the support of professional photographer Cozmic Dave, came back with a fabulous collection of pictures and heaps of extra knowledge.

The group – which is supported with a grant from the Barnwood Trust and is open to the whole community – is welcoming new members and it hopes the professional tuition will be a regular addition to its meet-ups.

The social aspect of sharing their hobby is another very important spin-off from the group, and friendships are already being forged within the group and with other keen photographers who joined them from GreenSquare housing.



The Snappers get close to nature on their recent assignment at the butterfly zoo. Thanks to Cozmic Dave for the photograph.

Members like to get out-and-about locally to take photographs of the landscapes and wildlife that surround them, but their repertoire will expand with their tuition and growing membership.

If you – or someone you know – has a passion for photography, or is just interested in giving it a go, please get in touch with the Bream Snappers via Facebook or through our own Community Engagement team.



Name:

Address:

Tel:

Safety inspectors

Four of our Centigen/PropertyPlus team have proved they have heads for heights after electing to be our scaffolding inspectors.

Tony Clements, Nick Harris, Mark Hawkins and Nick Lane have just completed a three-day training course run by the Construction Industry Scaffolders Record Scheme.

They now have the knowledge and skills to be able to inspect all scaffolding being used for our repairs and maintenance work, to make sure it is safe for use.

Mark Hawkins, Nick Lane, Tony Clements and Nick Harris are our scaffolding inspectors. A scaffold used for construction should be inspected before it is used for the first time, and then every seven days until it is removed. It should also be inspected each time it is exposed to conditions likely to cause deterioration, such as following adverse weather conditions or substantial alteration.

Well done to all four of them.



Festive tea break

We had plenty of entries for our autumn competition and every single one was correct, so John Pearson did particularly well to be picked as the winner.

Congratulations John — and to everyone who took part and can bask in the glory of knowing they got the answer right!

Wordsearches are always very popular and, because it's Christmas, we've decided to make that our winter competition, to be enjoyed when you have a bit of down-time from the festivities.

There are 12 words listed, and only 11 of them are in the grid. Please tell us which one is missing, to be in with the chance of winning the £15 gift voucher.

Email communications@2rh.org.uk with the missing word or post your entry to:

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

Completed entries by **31 January** please. Enjoy!

Contact us:

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

Freephone **0800 316 0897**

customerservices@2rh.org.uk

Join the Two Rivers community on



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