**Summer 2019** 

# **Tenant Topics**

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# People-power creates play area



Lisa Chidley (back row, left) with Penny from our Community Engagement team, friends and neighbours – all looking forward to the new play area for Alvington.



This summer will be extra-fun for children in Alvington, thanks to local residents and parish councillors working together to create a safe place for youngsters to play in.

By the time the schools break up, a piece of land at Garlands Close will have been transformed into a football area and two activity towers with a slide and rope walkway, ready for the village children to enjoy.

The project has been led by Lisa Chidley, one of our residents and a parish councillor.

"It all started because the children were seen as a nuisance for playing football outside the houses," explained Lisa. "One day we got talking about it and decided to see what we could do.

"We asked the children what they would like, and here we are. We already have ideas for more equipment, but we'll start off small and see how it goes."

The play area belongs to Two Rivers, but we agreed to lease it to the parish council for a token 'peppercorn' rent. The money for the equipment comes from a grant, that Lisa and the council bid for.

"This is a great example of a community working together, and we're delighted to support it," said Justine Skitt, from our Neighbourhood Housing team. "The collective determination, co-operation and hard work of local residents and the council has been amazing, and has helped to create an exciting place where younger children from the whole village can play together safely."



# Plastic has had its chips!

If you received Tenant Topics by post, you hopefully noticed the new wrapper it came in.

Made from potato starch, it is fully biodegradable and will naturally break down and disappear when disposed of with garden and food waste.

We introduced this after a tenant queried why we still post Tenant Topics in a plastic wrapper, when we say we support environmental issues.

We thought this was a great question so we looked for a new solution, and the potato starch wrapper – which is usually made from waste potatoes – is it.



It costs just 3p extra per copy to make this eco-friendly switch, and we were delighted to find an affordable way to support the global campaign to reduce our reliance upon plastics, particularly those which are only used once.

So, please dispose of your potato starch wrapper in your compost bin, your garden waste bin or use it to line your food waste caddy. In less than six months it should have completely disappeared, without trace or impact! We post approximately 2,000 copies of Tenant Topics each issue, we handdeliver (without a wrapper) nearly 1,000 copies to our HomePlus residents and a further 1,250 tenants receive it by email.

If you prefer to receive your copy by email in future, please drop us a line to **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** and we will amend our records.

# A tasty birthday treat



A fish and chip lunch took on a special celebratory flavour when Babs Grobis chose it as her 100th birthday treat.

She shared the traditional meal at her Coleford home with her family, surrounded by cards, flowers and gifts from well-wishers.

Babs was born in Coalway. She and her husband Alex both worked at Lydbrook Cable Works, moving to Gloucester when the factory closed. They later returned to the Forest to make Coleford their home.

Babs and her husband enjoyed exploring the countryside in their caravan, and particularly loved spending time in the New Forest. They were married for 60 years before Alex passed away four years ago.

And what does Babs put her longevity down to? "Take each day as it comes," she says.

Our Scheme Co-ordinator Julie Shingles was one of many visitors to wish Babs a very happy 100th birthday.

#### SAVING TIP

Spread the cost of Xmas and keep an eye out for gift ideas over the summer – particularly the end-of-season sales.

### Proud of Gwyneth

Congratulations to Gwyneth Jacobs, who has been honoured with a Pride of Coleford award from the local council.

Gwyneth is a busy member of the Parkside community, getting involved with many of the social and fundraising activities involving her friends and neighbours.

The award was presented by the Mayor of Coleford in recognition of Gwyneth's community work, and one of her neighbours has made a splendid case to present it in, for all to admire.

# New home for bunnies

Two Rivers and builders' merchant Travis Perkins have joined forces to help a local charity supporting people with disabilities to build a 'rabbitarium'.

This wooden building is currently under construction at the Orchard Trust's smallholding at Lydbrook, and will provide a cosy home for many small animals, as well as a petting area which allows residents and visitors to get up close to them.

The charity, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, provides an environment where service users can interact with livestock including pigs, sheep, rabbits, ducks, chickens and guinea pigs. Helping to care for them gives great therapeutic and emotional benefit.

We have supported the Orchard Trust on several occasions through our Helping Hands staff volunteering scheme, and now we have teamed up <image>

with Travis Perkins Community Legacy Fund and provided materials to help create the rabbitarium.

"It's really important for visitors to see the animals in a happy, normal environment, and the rabbitarium will offer an area where service users can get close to the animals – hold them, stroke them or just watch them – and the animals can run around freely as well," explained Day Services Manager Phill Hucks. "We rely heavily on donations of both time and money to be able to provide these facilities, and we are extremely grateful for everything we receive. It makes such a difference to what we can do for our visitors."

The smallholding at Stowfield receives guests from across Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire and volunteers and visitors are always welcome.

## **Reducing plastic waste**

Refilling and reusing your plastic bottles is a great way to reduce waste – and save money too!

There is an upcycle eco-store inside the furniture warehouses at the Forest Upcycling Centres in Cinderford and Chepstow where you can get refills for the following:

- Washing up liquid 25p/100ml
- Kitchen and bathroom spray cleaner 20p/100ml
- Non-bio concentrated laundry liquid -50p/100ml
- Non-bio laundry liquid 35p/100ml
- Fabric conditioner 25p/100ml
- Toilet cleaner 25p/100ml

- Handwash 40p/100ml
- Shampoo 65p/100ml
- Conditioner 65p/100ml

Visit **www.forestupcyclingproject. com** for further information.



Refilling bottles with some everyday products can help reduce waste plastic.

## A fair deal

We have raised the earnings of our lowest-paid employees by adopting the Real Living Wage rate.

All staff over 25 previously earning the National Living Wage were awarded the increase after we decided it was the right thing to do for individuals and the future of our business.

The Real Living Wage is higher than the Government's recommended minimum and is entirely voluntary. It is independently calculated on what people need to get by, based on the cost of household goods and services.

The increase means most staff who benefit will each earn approximately £1,000 more per year.



## **Beware of flower pots!**

With summer in full-swing, many of us are enjoying lots of time in the garden – but there's a host of dangers lurking amongst the flower beds!

According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), around 87,000 people go to A&E in this country following a gardening accident – and the second most dangerous 'tool' is the innocent-looking flower pot (due to trips and falls)!

We can all take a few simple steps to avoid accidents and injuries:

- Clean as you work. Don't leave sharp tools lying around.
- Clean moss off steps and keep paths clear.



- Avoid lighting fires (and BBQs) near fences, sheds and trees.
- Supervise children near water and when you have a bonfire or BBQ.
- Always use a residual current device when using power tools and mowers.
- Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate.
- Always use ladders at the correct angle and on suitable level ground (angle = 1:4).

For further information and safety tips visit: www.rospa.com/home-safety/ advice/general/home-gardensafety-checklists

We've recently accepted the first new homes on a site at Tutshill near Sedbury – and they're looking really smart!

Bellway is building the Manor Chase development in Gloucester Road and we're taking 36 affordable rent and Shared Ownership properties over the next 12 months.

Our Development Co-ordinator Vicky Grant is pictured with Bellway Site Manager George Oliver receiving the keys to this lovely two-bedroom bungalow, one of the first four properties to be handed over to us.

### Seeking your views

Thank you to everyone who gets involved with our tenant telephone surveys.

Each year, an independent market research company carries these out on our behalf and speaks to nearly one-in-five of our tenants to find out what they think of their home, neighbourhood and our services. And the results are really useful.

We can compare the information with other similar housing associations, as well as with our own previous results, to see where customers think we are doing well and where we need to improve.

At the end of 2018/19 tenants said they like the area where they live and the overall quality of their home. They also told us we had improved the way we listen to their views and act upon then.

However, satisfaction with our repairs and maintenance services, and our services overall, were both slightly lower than last year.

All the scores and comments are being analysed and we will form action plans for the key areas where you have told us we could do better. This will include the repairs service but will also focus on customer contact – particularly how we respond to queries and keep you informed.

Liz settles down to indulge her love of magazine competitions!



"I love doing them and it keeps the old brain going," she said. "I go on the bus to pick them up, sit in a café and start doing them. I continue on the bus home and then, when I get back and have finished them all, I send the entries in."

# Big win is no puzzle!

A talent for puzzles and competitions has rewarded a Dymock woman with her first four-figure win!

Liz Brace has scooped several prizes of varying values over the years, but this one really took her by surprise.

"I opened the letter, thought it said £300 and that was enough," she explained, of the day her news arrived. "Then I put my glasses on and realised there was another nought!"

Every week Liz buys four magazines and ploughs through between 40 and 80 puzzles. By the end of the day she's finished them all, then she submits her entries and shares the answers with her two daughters – on the understanding all winnings are split three ways! Once that weekly pleasure is complete, Liz has plenty of time to devote to her other hobbies.

A skilled musician who spent many years singing in bands, she still plays piano, guitar, mandolin and banjo. Even now she travels all over the country giving moral support to her friends, The Smokey Mountain Boys.

But Liz's talents don't stop there and she also enjoys hobbies with local links. She is a modern-day 'Dymock Poet' with numerous examples of her work in print, and her knitting talents are regularly put to good use, reproducing the famous local wild daffodils in wool for fundraising fayres.

### Home improvements

If you're thinking of making some improvements to your home – large or small – please talk to us before you make firm plans, as you may need our permission.

We always encourage people to care for their homes, and will support projects where we can, but some work could have knock-on effects to things that cause problems in the future.

If you don't have our permission before you start, we will recharge you for any costs incurred in putting it right at a later date.

Even if your project seems relatively small, it's best to check with us first. You can email

customerservices@2rh.org.uk and we will do our best to help.

### Egg-cellent!

We were delighted to be able to deliver a huge collection of chocolate eggs to vulnerable and disadvantaged local families this Easter. The eggs were donated by Two Rivers, Centigen and TwoCan staff based at our Newent office and we hope every mouthful was enjoyed!



#### SAVING TIP

Free summer fun with the kids: have a reading marathon, write stories, paint or draw together, play football, go for a nature hunt, have a sunset picnic in the park, play board games, make a fort out of cardboard boxes, pick your own fruit...

# Fire is a

It takes less than five minutes for fire to completely engulf a home and, if you're asleep, you may not even know there's a fire developing.

Six tenants have had serious fires at their properties in the last two months, causing extensive damage, lost possessions and the trauma of a lucky escape.

One young family lost everything after a candle set light to a curtain, and they're still picking up the pieces of their life in temporary accommodation.

Another tenant lost their shed and damaged a wall after burning a sofa in the garden, two had incidents involving chip pans and a couple of people witnessed fires in their electrical appliances.

Other common causes are cigarettes and matches, burning the wrong fuel, portable heaters, overloaded sockets and barbecues.

#### Please:

- Take care of your home and read the advice in our Health and Safety Handbook (starting page 4) which is in the 'Library' on our website.
- Test your smoke alarms regularly. They can literally be life-savers.
- Keep all appointments for servicing checks.



This fire started in the living room but quickly spread to both floors of the house.

The first floor bathroom was severely damaged, even though the fire began downstairs.

- Make sure your home contents insurance is up-to-date. For less than £1 per week you could cover your belongings in the event of a loss. (Look at 'Your home/Money matters' on our website.)
- Remember, if you have a fire in your home and we find it was caused either deliberately or carelessly by you, your family or visitors, we will bill you for the excess payment charged by our insurers, which is currently £2,500.

## Please let us know

Feedback on our services is always appreciated, which is why we run regular surveys and encourage our tenants to tell us when they are not happy with usor send their thanks when things go well.

We always try to do things to our tenants' satisfaction, but we do accept that it doesn't always work out as well as they, or we, might hope.

If you are not pleased with our service, we prefer you to tell us straight away so that we have the chance to put things right if we can. However, if that does not resolve the matter, or you prefer to lodge a formal complaint, we have a process that will launch an investigation.

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, in writing (post or email) or you can use the 'Enquiry form' under the 'Contact us' section of our website. You will receive a written response from us within 10 working days and we hope that will resolve your issue. If not, and you can show that we have not met our policies or service standards, you can ask us to reconsider – and there are



three more stages of the process to go through.

We have a leaflet giving more detail about our complaints process and you can ask for a copy, or you'll find it in the 'News and Library' section of our website.



Dog lovers from all over the country will be visiting Coalway in July, to take part in an event organised by one of our tenants.

Eve Ford has been working for almost a year to plan the show which has become an annual fixture on the canine calendar, attracting competitors from right across the UK.

Eve is a true animal-lover. After many years supporting a cat rescue charity, she moved to a home with a garden and switched to caring for dogs. In the last 15 years she has fostered more than 40 dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes, often choosing to look after older and sicker animals, giving them a peaceful and loving end to their lives.

Her blue roan cocker spaniel Bo arrived at her home in Worrall Hill two years ago as a five-year-old with a difficult past. Now she is adopted and settled with Eve, who also raises money for the national charity Spaniel Assist Rescue and Rehoming (SARR).

This is the third show Eve has helped to organise for SARR and it is growing steadily in popularity, raising money that will be spent on vets' bills. "It's hard work, but I really enjoy it," explained Eve. "We spend such a lot of time talking online, and this is a wonderful opportunity to meet people face-to-face and socialise."

The SARR Dog Show is on **Saturday 13 July**, 10am to 4pm on Coalway Recreation Ground. No need to book, it's open to all breeds, and there are lots of other attractions plus canine experts to give advice. You can find further information on Facebook or email **fordevelyn537@gmail.com**.

### The green, green grass...

Our Centigen grounds maintenance team is hard at work, keeping our open spaces tidy over the summer months.

There are three different levels of service provided, according to the type of home in each area:

- Most tenants benefit from a 'standard' cut where the cuttings are collected at the beginning of the season, they're left in place mid to late summer, and collected after the final cut of the year.
- 2. HomePlus residents pay extra for an 'enhanced cut' and more attention to detail.

 Areas where our homes are outnumbered by home-owners (who don't contribute towards the cost of the service) receive a 'reduced' 'cutand-drop' four times a year.

Please note that some areas may not be cut if there are vehicles parked or property left on/next to them when the team visits. This is to avoid the risk of damage.

The grounds maintenance schedule and estate maps can be found on our website. Go to the 'Your home' section and choose the page called 'Grass cutting'. If you have any questions about the service you're receiving, please contact your Neighbourhood Housing Advisor.



# Free help to find work

Do you want to work, but need help to build your confidence or skills?

Stable employment offers self-worth, choice and freedom, building us as people and having a positive impact on the welfare of those around us.

The Salvation Army is running 'Employment Plus' (otherwise known as E+Local), which is a free support service to help build your confidence, motivation and skills, to help you to discover new things about yourself and provide short-term work-experience placements. These will give you a recent reference, build your self-esteem and help the local community.

The courses provide a friendly and relaxed atmosphere to learn skills such as CV-writing, interview techniques and job-searching. There is also access to computers and the internet, plus help to build the necessary digital know-how, where needed. You can attend E+Local at any time. It is entirely voluntary, free and confidential and is available to anyone who is unemployed and looking for work, and those who wish to learn new skills. E+Local runs from the Salvation Army Hub in Broadwell, on Tuesdays from 10am-1pm. You can call free on 0800 652 4276 for further details or visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/e-pluslocal.





A project to improve our garage blocks is about to begin, ranging from minor repairs to complete demolition and rebuild.

We are focusing on 26 sites across the Forest of Dean, and the first to benefit will see changes in the next couple of months. The rest will follow over several years, as we tackle them in turn.

We have written to everyone affected by this to give early notice, but firm

dates may not be known until much nearer to the time when work begins. Then we will write again, and will ask those with garages earmarked for refurbishment or a complete rebuild, to empty the space.

These garages are rented separately to our tenants and other members of the community who wish to use them to store a vehicle.

## Gold again!

Yet again, the internationally-renowned RoSPA, has judged our efforts to promote safe working practices as worthy of one of its top honours.

The Gold Medal recognises our consistent record of health and safety over many years, having assessed our policies, training records, systems and monitoring practices.

It is a prestigious award from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and is testament to the great efforts made by all our staff.



# Keeping you safe



Fire safety improvements are being made to some of our properties to make sure they continue to meet strict standards introduced in the wake of the Grenfell fire two years ago.

Working alongside a specialist fire consultant, our Maintenance team has thoroughly inspected fire doors and fire compartments across all of our affected properties, and started a programme of works.

The vast majority of our residents are not be affected by this as it generally only applies to our communal centres and flats with shared spaces.

All replacement doors will meet strict specifications and will be made and installed by an approved, certified manufacturer and contractor.

We will be contacting any tenants who are affected by this work to let them know what is happening, and to give the chance for them to ask questions about what's involved.

Tenant safety remains a top priority for us and we will continue routine inspections and assessments to make sure we meet all statutory and legal requirements.

#### SAVING TIP

If you're home from holiday, empty the car of things you don't need to carry, and take off that roof rack. Extra weight uses more fuel.



The sight of our Centigen staff and vehicles is a familiar one around the Forest, as teams maintain our green spaces and clean our communal centres.

Now the green and black Centigen logo will become even more commonplace as we start to transfer our electricians, plumbers, builders and general trade operatives across to join the Centigen team.

However, it is going to take a while for us to achieve a full transition as we need to provide them all with uniforms, vans and badges. That means some will continue to use the blue Two Rivers Housing branding you recognise, while others will display the Centigen brand. We aim to issue new items as a complete set, so they should be one or the other, until the transfer is complete.

We appreciate this may be confusing, and that's why we would urge you to please check the identity of people calling at your home, who say they are working on behalf of either Two Rivers Housing or Centigen. If you don't know them or feel confident in letting them into your home, please ask them to wait outside – with the door shut – while you call our office to check.

If you ring 0800 316 0897 and tell us their name and describe them to us, we should be able to confirm they are who they say they are, and give you peace of mind to let them into your home.

Thank you for your support.

# Don't get in a flap!

Many of our tenants like to keep a cat, but if your home is fitted with a modern composite-style door, we will no longer give permission to fit a cat flap.

This is because these doors are designed to make homes warmer and safer, and alterations can significantly reduce the benefits. In fact, we often get complaints of draughts from tenants who move into a home where a cat flap was fitted by a former tenant, and they didn't remove it when they left.

So, if you are thinking of keeping a cat, please consider how you will let it in and out of the house before you make that

commitment, and get in touch with your Neighbourhood Housing Advisor to discuss.





### Creative Carol's crush on cards!

Carol Norris has been perfecting her card-making skills over the past seven years and produces beautiful, intricate, decoupage cards for all occasions.

Carol's aunt started the hobby and encouraged Carol to give it a go. She found it surprisingly relaxing and therapeutic and hasn't looked back since. In fact, many of her family have also taken it up in their spare time.

Although she only moved to her Coleford bungalow last year, Carol has settled in well and made a lot of new friends. Now she makes cards for family, friends and neighbours who can't get to the shops. She also has a market for them at local craft fayres.

Carol's lounge is full of beautiful papers and craft items, and she is looking forward to taking her hobby outside, into her summerhouse in the back garden, where she will have a bit more space.

Cards range from 50p to £4 and Carol is just starting a countryside and floral-themed batch.

Keep your eyes peeled at local craft fayres, and you might just see Carol with her cards.

# Help us to improve

If you think Two Rivers could do better, you might like to be part of the tenant team which suggests how we do it.

Our Resident Scrutiny Group does what it says on the tin – you get to examine what we do to make sure we are doing right by our tenants. If you think we could improve, we will listen to your suggestions and present them to our Board.

It's a great opportunity to influence change, right at the top of our organisation.

You will be given access to information, you might make a site visit and you can ask staff why we do things the way we do, so you can suggest how we make it better for our tenants.

But we won't just throw you in at the deep end; we will provide all the training you need and help you settle in.

You don't need any qualifications; we just ask that you're keen and willing to make a difference and help us improve our service.

The group meets to carry out its research and write its reports. Meeting times and locations are flexible to encourage people of all ages to get involved, and we will pay reasonable expenses.

If you're interested and would like to know more, please contact Alison Tolley on **01531 829310** or email **alison.tolley@2rh.org.uk**.

'My account'

# **Online is easy!**

Our online tenant portal 'My account' grows in popularity, with one-third of our tenants with internet access using it regularly.

Most find it particularly helpful for reporting non-emergency repairs – especially as they can choose an appointment slot at the same time – and we hear it is really easy to use.

Almost nine out of 10 people across the UK have internet access, although just under two-thirds of our tenants say the same, and that figure drops to less than half of our HomePlus tenants.

So, although we encourage people to use the online options provided in 'My account' because it can be quicker and more convenient, we know this doesn't suit everyone.

If you would like to see what 'My account' has to offer, go to our website – www.tworivershousing.org.uk/ your-home/my-account - register

Book a repair online and choose an appointment time that suits you.

Over **a third** of all tenants with online access are now using My account.

and explore! If you need any help, just contact our Customer Service team, who will be pleased to guide you.

Gwyn, Rebecca and Martin are ready to help address your money worries.

## They've done it again!

Our team of welfare advisors achieved more than £1.5 million worth of claims and awards on behalf of our tenants last year.

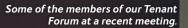
They supported over 300 people and families in a 12-month period, helping them claim benefits they didn't realise they were entitled to, advising them how to manage their debts, applying for grants and dealing with issues relating to Universal Credit.



They also achieved a 95% success rate on cases they supported through tribunal.

Our three advisors – Rebecca, Gwyn and Martin – have many years of financial experience between them, and they achieve more for our tenants every year. If you are struggling to manage your money and would like some free and confidential advice, they will be only too happy to help.

Email **WBDATeam@2rh.org.uk** or call **0800 316 0897** to arrange an appointment.



# Join the debate

Would you like to influence the way we do things? Maybe you have experiences that show what we do well, and where we could improve?

Our Tenant Forum explores topics directly-related to our services, and also considers wider issues affecting our society that impact on our tenants and their families. It's a chance to air thoughts and enjoy healthy debate, and we aim to end meetings with action points that will strengthen services or improve the situation.

Topics previously discussed include our online tenant portal 'My account', our Corporate Plan (which identifies our key projects) and our Customer Service team, while we have also talked about food poverty and furniture recycling. The Forum meets every two months and the next meetings are on 9 July and 10 September. Please get in touch with our Community Engagement team if you would like to find out more. Call **0800 316 0897** or email **communityengagementteam@2rh. org.uk**.

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for you - for your community - not for profit
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#### Which summer word is missing from the grid?

beach bucket daisy garden holiday ocean

picnic rose sandals sun travel waves

#### Name:

Address:

Tel number/email:

# Tree-mendous!

The survey of trees in our communal spaces – mentioned in the last issue – is now complete and a rolling programme of maintenance has begun.



We visited 236 sites and recorded more than 1,600 trees, and were pleased to find that nearly 90% of them are in great condition. Those which need work will be attended to over the next couple of years, and we have just appointed a specialist contractor to do that work on our behalf.

Now that we have an accurate picture of the trees on our land we will be able to review and monitor any changes in future years, and take the necessary action.

The affected trees are only on communal spaces. This does not affect those in people's gardens.

# Summer tea break

Last month's spot-the-difference competition proved to be quite a challenge, and we had nearly as many wrong answers as right ones! It seemed to be the daffodil leaves that caused most problems!

But it didn't faze Shirley Blacker, and we send our congratulations and the £15 gift voucher to her for being the first correct entry to be pulled from the 'hat'.

This time we return to the very popular wordsearch, with a summer theme. There are 12 words listed – but you won't be able to find one of them in the grid. You just need to tell us which is the missing word and, if you'd like to be in with a chance of winning the next £15 voucher prize, you can enter the competition by post or email.

Email the missing word to communications@2rh.org.uk or post your completed form highlighting the missing word to:

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

Please send your entry to us by **31 July**. Have fun!

### 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

Join the Two Rivers community on





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www.tworivershousing.org.uk