

# Tenant Topics

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## My life in lockdown

*“It will be necessary to go further and to ensure that those with the most serious health conditions are largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks.”*

These words, spoken by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on 16 March this year signalled a huge change for Claire.



**Our lives have been turned upside down by the Coronavirus outbreak. We spoke to Two Rivers' tenant Claire Gwynne about her experience and how she is helping others stay connected during the countrywide lockdown.**

After a 20-year career at the DWP supporting families through the benefits system, Claire was diagnosed with a rare degenerative neurological disorder. Her condition meant that she is amongst those needing to shield themselves from the virus. The thought of being isolated from her friends and family for 12 weeks left her feeling shocked and panic stricken.

*“I was worried about the impact lockdown would have on my routine, on day-to-day things like doing the shopping as well as how I would get to my medical appointments,”* Claire explained. *“Initially I think I was in disbelief – we’d seen it happening in other countries, but I don’t think we ever thought it would be like that in the UK.”*

*“As I heard the words isolation, I thought how am I going to cope being stuck here all the time? It felt like a prison sentence.”*

But Claire was determined to make the most of the situation and do what she could to help her friends and family stay connected during the lockdown.

**continued on page 2**

## My life in lockdown continued on from page 1

*"My condition affects quite a lot of my body and I don't really know what my future holds, but I've always tried to stay positive and focus on what I can do."* Claire said. *"So, I pulled myself together, made a plan to keep myself active and did a lot of thinking about how I could keep in touch with my friends and family while in isolation."*

Claire used her technology skills to set up a Whatsapp group for her parents and wider family to stay in touch. The first challenge was teaching her elderly parents how to use the app.

By adding her own friends to the group, Claire managed to increase her parents own social group too, keeping them connected to the outside world in a way that they would not have thought possible. They were even invited to take part in an online Zoom quiz hosted

by one of her friends, which has now given them the confidence to talk to other family members that live farther away, like Claire's brother who lives in Germany. Claire is now actively trying to get her neighbours online too!

*"I think people, particularly older generations, are weary of technology. They don't realise how easy it is to use, but once they learn how to use it it's really beneficial. Suddenly they can see someone, that they haven't seen for weeks, in their home and that's just such a wonderful thing."*

*"People have been brilliant,"* Claire added. *"They've been sharing photos of the activities they are doing in lockdown, gardening, baking, arts and crafts and all kinds of things – it's inspired me to do some of these activities myself."*

*"My dad is in his 70s, so it was quite difficult at first. For a long time, we just saw half his head in the conversation, or he'd have the camera round the wrong way, but he's got much better and uses it much more now."*



## Claire's top tips for life in lockdown

1. Plan what you are going to do for the next day.
2. Keep to a routine.
3. Stay positive and find ways to lift your spirits when it gets hard.
4. Keep communicating with your family and loved ones.

*"Together we are learning a whole host of new skills – my mum tried to get me in to crocheting – I tried to make a blanket but I added too many stitches in it so it's a bit lopsided!"*

We asked Claire what she would say to anyone struggling with lockdown.

*"I try to stay positive, but there are days when I do feel quite down. When this happens, I try to do something to take my mind off it. I listen to music, sing, play games with my husband – we've been doing jigsaws too!"*

*"It's a really challenging time for everyone, but it's also an opportunity to learn new ways of doing things. I feel like the lockdown has given me the opportunity to really get to know my husband and my family more. We spend time together in a way that we haven't been able to before and that has been a real blessing."*

### 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.



# A message from our Chief Executive

As we go to print on this latest edition of Tenant Topics, the lockdown is starting to ease, and we are moving towards a new 'normal'. It is clear that the impact of the Coronavirus will be felt for many months and we will all need to adapt to how we work and live going forwards.

At Two Rivers we are working closely with our team and our suppliers to adapt our working practices to ensure that we can resume services as safely and as quickly as possible. Since the lockdown, we have received more than 1,400 reported repairs and we are looking at how we prioritise these in order to work through them.

Over the next weeks and months, we hope to be able to widen the services

we can provide. Please rest assured that we will only do this when it is safe to do so, both for you and our team members. If you have any concerns, please contact our customer service team in the usual way and they will be able to help.

You will find all the latest information on our services on our website, [www.tworivershousing.org.uk](http://www.tworivershousing.org.uk).

Finally, stay safe and should you need any additional help and support, please make use of our new tenant support and wellbeing service, which is available now, you'll find more details on this on page 5.

**Garry King**  
CEO Two Rivers Housing

## Our Rivers Meet office



On March 23, we made the decision to close our Rivers Meet office and move to an essential repairs service. As the country remained in lockdown, many of our team members adjusted to life

working from home, while others from our Centigen team continued to deliver essential and emergency repairs.

Our Rivers Meet office will remain closed to the public until at least the end of

August but you can still contact our customer service team on **0800 316 0897** or [customerservices@2rh.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@2rh.org.uk).



# Keeping children sunshine safe

Take extra care if you have young children, who may burn more easily.

- Encourage children to play in the shade for example under trees, especially between 11am and 3pm when the sun is at its strongest.
- Use plenty of sunscreen even on cloudy or overcast days. Use a sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 and protects against UVA and UVB rays and apply it to areas not protected by clothing including their face, ears, hands and feet.
- Take extra care to protect your child's shoulders and the back of their neck when they are playing, as these are the most common areas for sunburn.
- Cover your child in loose cotton clothing, such as an oversized t-shirt with sleeves.
- Try to encourage them to wear a floppy hat with a wide brim that shades their face, ears and neck.
- Protect their eyes with sunglasses – these should meet British Standard 1836:2005 and carry the CE mark (check the label).
- If your child is swimming or playing in a paddling pool, use a water-resistant sunscreen (factor 15 or above) and reapply as soon as they get out of the water, after towel drying, when it may have been rubbed off.

## Stay safe in the summer sun

While we may not be able to travel abroad this year, it's still important to stay safe in the sunshine. As the weather warms up make sure you and your family are protected by following these five simple steps:

1. Wear a hat
2. Protect your eyes
3. Apply sun cream regularly
4. Seek shade
5. Cover up



# Reaching our most vulnerable customers

Our neighbourhood housing team have not been able to make their usual visits to tenants, but this hasn't stopped them reaching out for a chat!

Since we went into lockdown our team have been busy making more than 1,200 calls a week to our HomePlus tenants.

They have also made additional calls to some of our older tenants in our general needs' properties, many of whom are having to shield themselves by staying at home.

These calls have been very much appreciated, with some of our tenants commenting that it is the only call they get all week and enjoying the opportunity to talk to someone for a few minutes.

Our team will continue calling tenants throughout the lockdown – though they may all need a good supply of throat sweets by the end of it!



## A helping hand during these difficult times

The Coronavirus outbreak has impacted all our lives and at times like these we could all do with some extra help and support. In May 2020, we launched our new tenant support and wellbeing service on a three-month trial.

The free and confidential service, allows all our tenants to access help and support on a range of topics including, health and wellbeing, mental health and wellbeing, relationships, debt management, consumer rights and workplace issues.

The service is being provided by Life & Progress, an independent health and wellbeing provider. It will provide practical information, resources and counselling for those that need it and there are no limits to the number of times a tenant can access the service.

You can access help and support 24-hours a day by calling **0800 083 3375** or visiting the dedicated tenant support and welfare website **www.tsws-access.co.uk** and logging in using these details:

Username: **tworiverstenant**

Password: **tenantsupport**

The service is currently available until the end of July.

### SAVING TIP

*Eat well on a budget – only buy what you actually need and don't be persuaded by BOGOF offers that encourage you to buy more.*



## Two Rivers takes gold for the seventh time

In April Two Rivers was awarded a gold medal for demonstrating high health and safety standards from The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

Organisations receiving a RoSPA Award are recognised as being world-leaders in health and safety practice. Every year, nearly 2,000 entrants strive to achieve the highest possible accolade in what is the UK's longest-running health and safety industry awards.

Staff from Two Rivers will be presented with a gold medal during a special ceremony at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel later this year.





## Did you know...



Grass makes up **26%** of all plant life on the planet



Under the right conditions it can grow up to **6 inches** per month



Our grounds maintenance team will mow more than **3.5million m<sup>2</sup>** of grass during the cutting season



All of the grass cuttings we collect are composted at a **local farm**

## Green Green Grass

As the country went into lockdown, Two Rivers suspended its grounds maintenance programme. This means that rather than starting in April, our grass cutting schedule began at the end of May.

As you can imagine, our grounds maintenance team have some catching up to do! We are doing everything we can to

get a first cut completed across all our common areas as quickly as we can, so please bear with us over the next few weeks.

At the end of the season, we will of course review the service we were able to deliver and make any necessary adjustments to our service charges.

## Where to find the latest service updates from Two Rivers Housing

For the latest information and updates on changes to our services:

Visit our website:  
[www.tworivershousing.org.uk](http://www.tworivershousing.org.uk)

Like us on Facebook:  
[@TwoRiversHousing](https://www.facebook.com/TwoRiversHousing)

Follow us on Twitter:  
[@TRHousing](https://twitter.com/TRHousing)





## Restarting our repairs service

## Help us reduce repair waiting times

Many appointments attended by our repairs team are unsuccessful because the tenant isn't home when they arrive.

Not only does this mean that we have to reschedule the appointment for that tenant, it also means our operatives are not able to attend other properties during that time.

But you can help! Please make sure you are at home when our operatives are due to arrive and if you need to rearrange your appointment please do this as soon as possible.

This will help us manage our operatives work schedules and deliver a more effective repairs service.



We are looking at how we can restart the services we had to suspend. The safety of our tenants and team members is, and always will be, our number one priority and we will only restart these services when it is safe to do so.

Following a consultation with our Centigen operatives, we were able to restart our grass cutting service at the end of May.

We have also started our external planned maintenance programme. This includes works to external areas of our homes such as repairs to footpaths, gates and fences.

Since the lockdown our tenants have reported more than 1,400 repairs to our customer service team. We are currently looking at how we prioritise this backlog and how we can safely start to undertake repairs in our homes.

Where possible we will share our plans with our tenant groups for their thoughts and feedback. If you would like to be part of this process please contact Anthea Tawney [anthea.tawney@2rh.org.uk](mailto:anthea.tawney@2rh.org.uk) or call **0800 316 0897**

Please be assured that we will only carry out repairs where it is safe to do so and in line with government advice and guidelines.

## Help us keep our team members safe

As we come out of the lockdown and restart our repair and maintenance services, it is likely that you will come in to contact with our Centigen team. We will be providing them with personal protective equipment and new ways of working to help keep them safe while they are working in and around your property.

But we need your help to keep them safe too! By following these simple guidelines, you can help reduce the risk to you, your family and our team.

- If anyone in your family has symptoms of Coronavirus, please let us know before your appointment so we can rearrange the visit for a safer time.
- Our team will call you on the morning of your appointment to check

if anyone in your household has symptoms of Coronavirus.

- Our operatives will also call you before they visit your home. They will ask:
  - If anyone in your household has symptoms of Coronavirus.
  - If they are working inside your home, they will ask you to ensure that no one enters the area they are due to work in for 15 minutes before their arrival.
  - On arrival, they will ask you not to enter the room where they are working.
- While our operative is working please keep your family at least two metres away from them.
- Our operatives will be using appropriate personal protective equipment and taking relevant

precautions in line with our safe systems of work.

- Please don't offer our operatives drinks or refreshments.

If a member of our team feels that you, or a member of your family, is compromising their safety, they will make the job safe and leave the property. They will also report this behaviour to our neighbourhood housing team, who may take further action.

The safety of our tenants and our team members is our top priority. We will do everything we reasonably can to protect you and our team, while we undertake repairs and maintenance work in and around your home. Please follow this guidance to help support us.



# Summer in your garden!

The summer months are often full of colour, with roses looking particularly beautiful at this time of the year. To keep them flowering for longer, dead head the spent flowers regularly. This will keep the plants producing new flowers throughout the season. If you can, apply a rich manure as a mulch to the top layer of soil around your roses – this will give them the boost they need to keep flowering.

Is there anything that signifies summer months in the UK more than strawberries? At this time of year, the fruit will begin to ripen, place straw around the base of your strawberry plants under the developing fruits to protect them from pests. Water them regularly for a bumper crop!

We've already had a very dry spring. In this weather watering your garden is essential. This is best done early in the morning or at dusk as watering mid-day can damage tender leaves.

We'd love to see pictures of your garden in bloom and share some of them with others on our social media channels. Please send you pictures to [communications@2rh.org.uk](mailto:communications@2rh.org.uk).

# How does your veggie garden grow?

Since the UK went into lockdown, the weather has been glorious and many people have turned to their gardens as a safe outdoor space. Alongside this, there has been a trend toward growing your own fruit and veg, but you don't need to spend money on seeds to get started! Here we look at how you can re-grow new food sources from scraps – the ultimate eco garden!

## Potatoes

We've all been there – opened the cupboard to find the bag of potatoes starting to sprout! But rather than throwing them out, try replanting them. You'll need a deep container filled with soil. Simply plant the potato with the eye (the small indentation where the shoot appears) facing upwards and new potatoes will grow.

## Spring onions and leeks

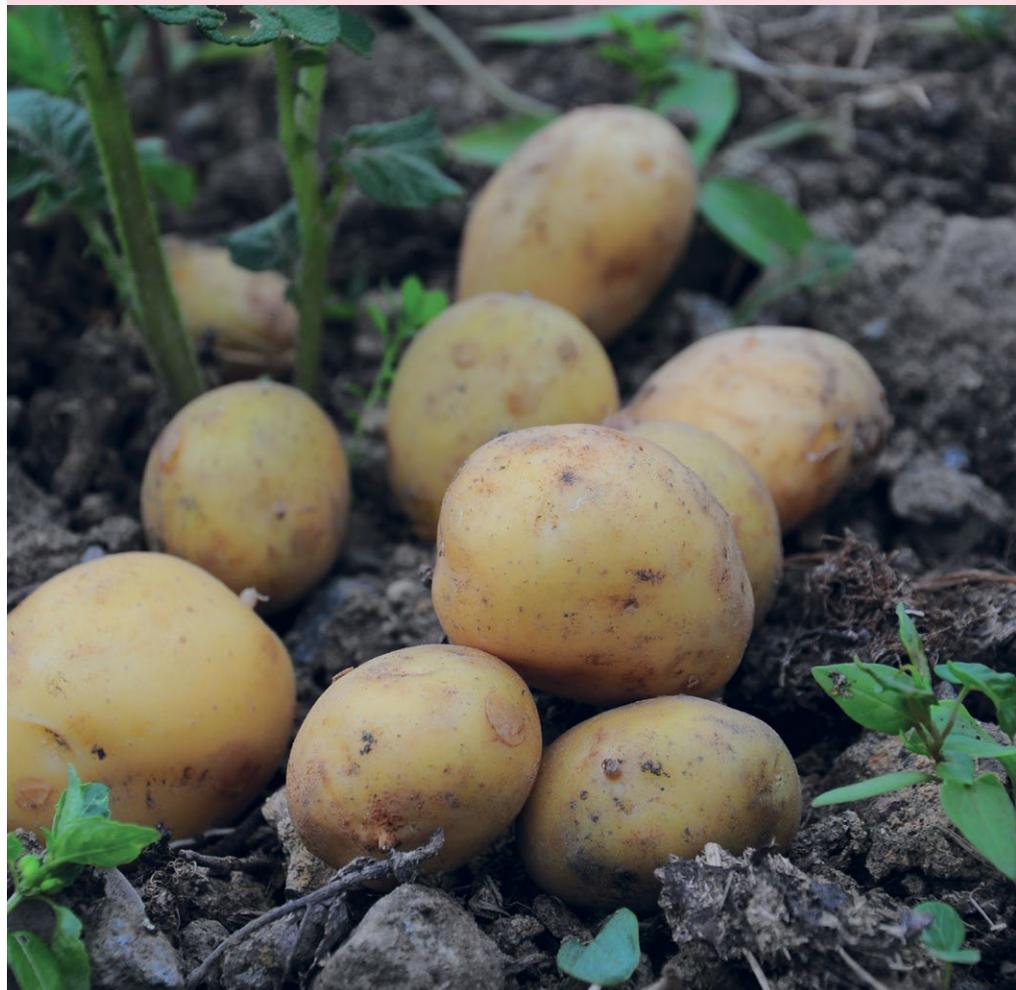
Simply save the base of the spring onion or leek (where the roots are) and place them in a shallow dish of water. A new green shoot will grow from these pretty quickly, which you can either harvest or plant in the garden to grow further.

## Carrots

Stop! Don't throw away those carrot tops! Place them in a container of water and new green shoots will appear. You can use the greens in salads, you can also use the leaves of other vegetables you grow such as beetroot, radishes and peas too!

If you give any of these ideas a go, why not send us a picture of your crops for the next issue of Tenant Topics? We'd love to see them!

[communications@2rh.org.uk](mailto:communications@2rh.org.uk)



# Help us shape the future of Two Rivers

Working with our tenants to help improve our products and services is a key part of our organisation's strategy and we are looking for tenants to help us shape the future of their housing association.

We are looking for people like you, who can help us in reviewing our current services, developing new ones and providing opinions on new ideas and activities. It could be as simple as completing an online poll or survey or conducting an in-depth review of a service area and sharing it with our board members.

It's a great way to develop your own skills and confidence, as well as ensuring that the views of our tenants are represented throughout our decision-making process. We are currently

looking for people to join our Challenge and Change Group and our Facebook Group – Your Views.

## About our Challenge and Change Group

As the name implies, this group exists to challenge us on our working practices and suggest changes that will improve our service.

We offer training for group members, which might help those who are keen to

learn new skills that could be useful on a CV. We will also pay travel expenses to meetings or arrange transport for those who would otherwise find it difficult to get to them.

As part of this group you'll be asked to attend a meeting every other month, contribute to reports and papers on the services you have reviewed and share findings with our board members.

## About our Facebook Group – Your Views

This is a new group that has been created to help us shape and improve our services.

If you live in a Two Rivers Housing home, you can join in and feedback to us in the "Your Views" group. Keep up to date with service reviews, complete quick surveys/polls or take part in consultations and see what training opportunities are available.

This is a short time commitment and you can take part in what is of interest to you.

If you are interested in joining either of these groups please get in touch with Anthea Tawney [anthea.tawney@2rh.org.uk](mailto:anthea.tawney@2rh.org.uk) or call **0800 316 0897**.

## Challenge & Change

Two Rivers Housing



## Strengthening our commitment to tenant engagement

In April this year Two Rivers rejoined Tpas, England's leading tenant engagement experts. Originally launched as a tenant participation service, Tpas now supports more than 200 housing associations, local authorities, residential groups and contractors with tenant engagement projects.

We believe that by working together with our tenants we can improve services, reduce costs and strengthen our communities. The Tpas membership gives both our team and our tenants access to free training, resources and expertise on a range of topics that impact the social housing sector.

As a tenant of Two Rivers you can become a member of Tpas too. Simply visit the Tpas website, select 'Our members' from the membership drop down and search for Two Rivers. Click the green join as a tenant button and create an account.

[www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)



# Moving home post lockdown



In May the government began to lift lockdown restrictions. This included the ability to move home as long as it could be done while adhering to social distancing rules. As a result, we will be making some changes to the way in which we let our properties.

Most of the information we need from you will be gathered over the telephone. This will include the pre-tenancy interview.

One of our experienced neighbourhood housing team will talk you through your tenancy agreement and outline the key points you need to be aware of. They will also help you complete the forms and talk you through what will happen next.

You will need to pay your rent in advance as agreed and this will need to be done by card as we are currently unable to accept cash payments.

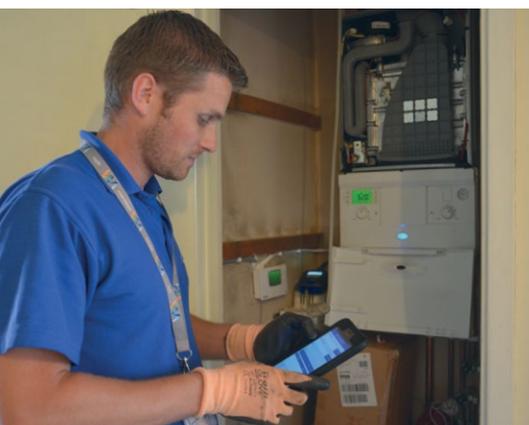
When viewing the property and on the day you get your keys, a member of our team will meet you at the property. They will unlock the property prior to your arrival and will not enter the property at the same time as you.

Please help us keep both you and our team safe by following social distancing guidelines and letting us know if you, or a member of your household has symptoms of Coronavirus before you attend a property.

## Thank you Travis Perkins

In the spring issue of Tenant Topics, we announced a change of supplier for our repairs and maintenance business. In this issue we bid a fond farewell to Travis Perkins and thank them for helping us deliver some great community projects through the Travis Perkins Community Fund.

Since January 2019, the fund has donated more than £12,000 to community projects across the area. From everyone that has benefitted from the community fund – we want to say a big thank you!



## Servicing your heating system

A number of tenants have asked why we are still servicing heating systems during the lockdown. As your landlord we are legally required to undertake an annual safety check and service of your heating system.

If you are currently shielding and have a letter from the NHS, we can postpone your heating service until the end of the 12-week shielding period. In all other

cases you should allow us to enter your home to carry out these checks.

All of our operatives have had additional training on how to undertake these checks while observing the social distancing rules. Please help us to keep you safe by allowing us to undertake these checks and following the social distancing instructions of our operatives.

# Tackling anti-social behaviour during lockdown



Times are particularly tough at the moment, and with so many of us spending more time at home, we all need to be a little bit more respectful of each other. In recent months, we have seen almost a 40% increase in calls about anti-social behaviour from our tenants.

This includes eight times as many calls complaining about noise. Please think about those around you during this difficult time, be considerate and respect where you live and the communities you share.

Often, the best results come from communicating with each other. If you feel that your neighbour is causing you an issue, talk to them about it and

explain clearly and calmly what the problem is.

We have a dedicated team that investigates anti-social behaviour. They work with neighbours and partnering agencies such as the police, local councils and other local services to try and resolve cases without having to take legal action. We are reviewing our processes so that we can adapt them to continue to support our communities during the current restrictions.

If you need to speak to us or to report anti-social behaviour, please call our customer service team on **0800 316 0897** or email the anti-social behaviour team direct on **asb@2rh.org.uk**.

## SAVING TIP

*Bulk meals out with extra veggies and save some for tomorrow's lunch. Even better – freeze it and when money's tighter you have meals on hand.*



## Your rent questions answered

Throughout the pandemic we've been helping tenants manage their rent and wider finances. Our income collection team have provided answers to the most commonly asked questions below:

### **Why has there been no rent holiday?**

In line with the government advice, you should continue to pay your rent during the coronavirus outbreak. If you are unable to do this, you should contact Two Rivers as soon as possible.

Two Rivers rents are set at least 80% below private market levels and we do not charge interest on arrears or late payments. Our debt and welfare team can also provide support if you are in financial difficulty.

While many mortgage providers offered borrowers the chance to apply for a payment holiday during the outbreak, this simply means any missed payments are added to the end of the mortgage period. Not only does this extend the length of the mortgage, it could also

incur additional costs due to the interest applied across the lifetime of the mortgage.

### **I have received notification from Two Rivers that says my rent is overdue, what should I do?**

Please don't ignore it. Even if you aren't able to pay the full amount due, you should contact Two Rivers. Doing this means that we are fully aware of your situation and will be able to offer help and support based on your circumstances.

Don't forget we have an experienced welfare benefit and debt team, who can help you if you are facing financial difficulty.

### **I've already spoken to Two Rivers about my ability to pay my rent, but I am now returning to work, what should I do?**

If your payment date or frequency has changed or you are still struggling to make payments, please contact us to

discuss. This will help us to ensure we monitor your rent account correctly and avoid any unnecessary actions being taken.

### **I had a court hearing which was due to take place during lockdown, what should I do now?**

Some court hearing dates have already been rescheduled. If you haven't already done so, please contact us to discuss your situation.

### **Will further action be taken against me for rent arrears?**

Although the courts are currently closed for hearings, applications can still be made. We want to avoid making applications against anyone currently struggling due to Coronavirus where possible, however you must keep us up to date on your situation and payments. We are here to help and can provide benefit advice or arrange a suitable payment agreement.



# Summer tea break

## Win a £15 voucher

Grab a pen and a cuppa, sit back and complete our summer tea break competition.

All but one of the words listed can be found in our sun-shaped word search. Simply complete it and let us know which word is missing to be in with a chance of winning a £15 gift voucher.

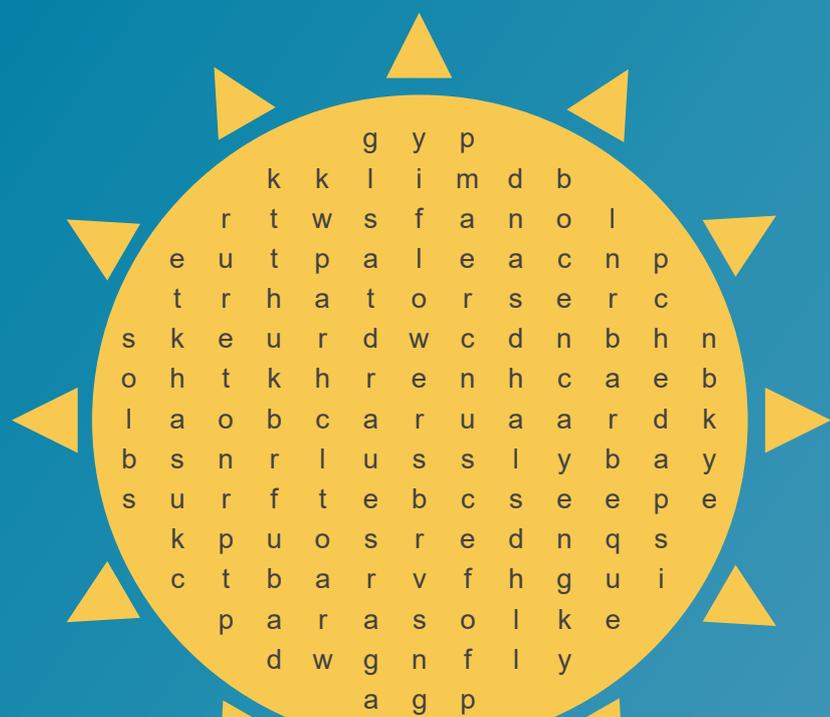
You can enter by emailing your name, full postal address and the missing word to us at **communications@2rh.org.uk** or by completing the form and returning it to us in the post to:

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

The first correct answer selected at random after **31 July 2020** will win a £15 gift voucher.

The missing word in our spring issue was daffodil.

Good luck!



beach  
barbeque  
shorts  
waves

flowers  
hat

sand  
parasol

sun cream  
seagull  
bucket  
spade

Which *summer* word is missing from the grid?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel number/email: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred voucher:  Amazon  Tesco  M&S  B&Q  Argos  Dining Out



## Need a little extra help and support?

At times like these we could all do with a little extra help. There are many agencies, groups, shops and individuals that are trying to help their local community get through this difficult time.

You'll find a list of local services including home delivery services, community groups and telephone befriending services on our website: **www.tworivershousing.org.uk/communityhelp.**

## 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



@TRHousing and



  
**tworivers**  
HOUSING

Registered Charity No1104723