

## Steve Clarke to step down after 29 years at SHS

Our Chief Executive Steve Clarke is stepping down after 29 years at the helm of Suffolk Housing Society.

He joined us in January 1982 when the Society had just 220 properties and when he was one of three staff at our head office - two rooms at the back of Jubilee Court in Bury St Edmunds.



The Society is very different today thanks to Steve's strategic vision and foresight. We now have more than 2,000 affordable homes in towns and villages made up of flats and houses as well as sheltered accommodation within 40 miles of Bury St Edmunds.

Suffolk Housing now employs more than 30 people from its headquarters at Old Mission House.

"Working for an organisation that has grown so much has always been interesting and challenging. I'm proud of the fact that Suffolk Housing Society has grown into a successful organisation with a good reputation among its tenants, employees and the communities in which we have homes. I have always wanted to ensure that our tenants had high quality and well maintained homes and that our staff were always available to provide a friendly and personal service when a tenant needed help.

"I will miss the many people with whom I have worked and helped over the years but I won't be moving away so I'll be able to keep watch and have a keen interest in the Society in the future."

Suffolk Housing chairman Nigel Aitkens said: "Steve's determination has always been for the Society to develop high quality accommodation at affordable rents for families and individuals in housing need in the communities where we work and this he has achieved.

"The fact that we are among the best of the small to medium-sized social housing providers in the country is down to Steve's leadership and commitment to keeping costs low and standards high.

"We all owe him a great debt of gratitude and we wish him well in his future endeavours."

Our new Chief Executive is Ian Winslett, who currently works for Croydon Churches Housing Association. We will introduce Ian in our next Interlink.

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# And the winner is...

## **Gardener of The Year 2010.**

Roderick Sprake an independent horticultural judge had his work cut out judging the competition this year as there was a good standard of entries for gardens and pots and planters. His final decision was:

### **GARDEN:**

Mrs H Saunders of Debenham

### **POTS AND PLANTERS:**

Mr I Hastie of Clare

Both winners will receive an annual subscription to Gardener's World magazine.

### **Spot the Difference:**

Lots of you guessed the number of differences in the beach hut photo, but Sheila Bluett's entry was the one pulled out of the draw – Sheila wins vouchers to the value of £25.

Well done to everyone who has entered the competitions, but don't give up, it could be you next time!



## Barbeques and morning coffee

A big thank you to all the residents who organised an open day and barbeque at St Marys Close, Mildenhall. The weather was beautiful and the burgers cooked to perfection. There was an opportunity for visitors to have a look around the scheme and individual flats to see if sheltered housing would suit their needs.

The weather wasn't so kind the following week when we hosted a barbeque at Bond Street in Ipswich. Despite the grey sky a couple of valiant residents came out to see us and had an opportunity to discuss repair issues with our contractor and neighbourhood issues with the police. Ipswich waste management team supplied a number of leaflets and freebies which were distributed to all residents.

A small number of residents from Sudbury met with Tenant Voice representatives to air their views at Costa Coffee within Tesco. There was a good discussion about how the Society operates and suggestions for doing things better, especially for residents moving into brand new homes.

If you would like to get together with a couple of your neighbours to meet with Tenant Voice representatives or a member of staff from the office let Hazel (01284 773446) or Jonathan know (01284 715391). We can arrange to come to your home or find somewhere local, such as Costa Coffee!

## If in doubt keep them out



That's the message from Suffolk Police who are reminding everyone about bogus callers in the area. Incidents in Ipswich and Bury occurred during July and August with offenders deliberately targeting the elderly. The general advice from the police is that if someone turns up on your doorstep asking to come into your home you should call the company they claim to be from and check who they are. All the utility providers are used to being asked for identification, and won't mind waiting if you want to phone and confirm their identity. You can also set up passwords with providers to give you extra security.

### **Don't forget:**

- Lock – keep your front and back doors locked, even when at home
- Stop – before you answer the door stop and think if you are expecting anyone, check you have locked any back door and take the key out, then look through the spy hole or window to see who is calling.
- Chain – put a door chain or bar on (do leave this off when you are at home in case you need to get out in an emergency!)
- Check – check the details and identity of the caller before you let them into your home. If you are not happy don't let them in.
- Don't forget all staff and contractors working for the Society also have identity cards which you should ask to see before allowing them into your home.

**We have four Housing Officers who look after 1,700 properties across East Anglia. No two days are the same as they deal with a whole host of queries. As well as visiting residents to inspect properties, discuss repairs, complaints or antisocial behaviour they also visit each of their schemes at least once every six weeks; they monitor the grounds maintenance contractors and carry out a scheme walkabout with the contractor annually.**

Below is one day in the life of Housing Officer Heidi Adams. Heidi looks after almost 400 properties in an area that covers Kenninghall in the north to Ipswich in the east and Wickhambrook in the south.

## A day in my life

Arrived in the office just after 8am and find 12 emails from yesterday and 3 messages on my answer phone. These messages range from other professionals inviting me to attend meetings to residents with queries/complaints about repairs/car parking/other residents. I respond to the urgent ones straight away and then check my diary to see what I am doing today.

My first meeting of the day at 9am is with the other housing officers to discuss our diary and workloads for the week and any properties we have empty and where we are with re-letting them.

After the meeting it's time to shortlist for an empty property. I spend an hour ringing and arranging viewings and finally have 3 confirmed viewings. I then contact a lady who viewed a property yesterday. After confirming that she would like the flat I contact her landlord for a reference, sort out the paperwork for her new tenancy and arrange a sign up appointment.

It is now 11.15am, I go back to my emails, some need referring to Customer Services, some need me to write to them or other residents and some involve making arrangements to visit.

I need to be in Ipswich this afternoon and before leaving the office I speak with Customer Services who need some information about a lock change and clarification about some repairs. I get to Ipswich at about 1pm, stopping briefly for a sandwich and a drink on route then on to the first appointment for 2pm. This is a property inspection for a flat about to become empty. We inspect to pick up any repairs we may need to do and get an idea of the condition. There are some changes the tenant has made and I ask her to put them right before she leaves the flat. I take meter readings and agree the date the keys will be returned to us.

Another visit on the other side of Ipswich with a tenant who is struggling with some repairs and other issues and I have agreed to meet her and her support worker to discuss these.

This done I need to go back across town to meet the Safer Neighbourhood Team who are helping with some anti-social behaviour problems on one of my sites. I have a moment before they arrive to deal with 3 phone messages left by Customer Services. It is now 4pm as we begin exchanging files of information. We discuss action plans and I agree to take the evidence to our solicitors.

It is now 5.10pm, I ring the office to say I am safe and well and finished for the day.



## Hello... goodbye...

There have been a number of changes in staff recently, we said goodbye to Darryl Durno, Housing Trainee, and we welcomed Karen Moore, who has replaced Helen Palmer as Office Manager. Our new Finance Trainee, Zoe Lucas, has been settling in for a couple of months and Janet Smith joined our ranks as scheme co-ordinator at Fornham House when Nigel Pinnock made the decision to leave us at the end of August.

Jonathan Routledge started working with us in August as Tenant Liaison Officer and will be working with Tenants Voice to promote tenant involvement.



*Clockwise from top left: Zoe Lucas, Janet Smith, Jonathan Routledge*

## Apology...

Please accept our apologies if you used the website to log a repair or complaint during July. It would seem there was a glitch with the site and the reports were not getting to us at the office. This has now been resolved and the information is coming through to us. If you did send us a message via the website and you haven't had a response, please let Customer Services know on 01284 767224 or customerservices@suffolkhousing.org

# Lewis Close

Our properties in Lewis Close, Hopton have all recently had new kitchens installed by a new contractor, Fosters.

Within days of the work starting I received several phone calls from residents telling me how pleased they were with the standard of work carried out and the helpfulness of the workmen on site. Comments included were "I am thrilled with my kitchen and the guys were fantastic" and "People are normally quick to complain but not to congratulate but I had to call and tell you how happy I am with my kitchen".

Foster's employ a dedicated liaison officer who is on hand to organise the schedule and deal with any issues. She also goes with Peter Dyson, Technical Services Officer to sign off the completed kitchens in each property to ensure all work is to a high standard. Judging by my residents calls I would say this was a success.

## Heidi Adams



# A word from

As the newly elected Chair of Tenants Voice I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you about the work we have been doing in the past few months.



We have now elected a Vice Chair, Paula Bone, and a Board member, Joan Matthewman, which means that for the first time there will be three tenant representatives on the Board.

Tenants Voice have been looking at the Tenants Services Authority standards framework – which is a major piece of work for the Society, and addresses things such as – Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Neighbourhood and Community, Home standards and Tenancy.

As a group we have brought up matters of concern such as landscaping contracts, anti-social behaviour, repairs and maintenance.

We also have a sub-committee who approve Community Chest applications, and have supported several initiatives, including a new venture for young people in Thurston.

We now have a Tenant Liaison Officer, Jonathan Routledge, which will help to carry the group forward, and we will work with him to take Tenants Voice on to bigger and better things.

I would like to encourage you to join us on this committee – you would be made most welcome, and it's your chance to make a positive difference to the Society.

## Susan Feary, Tenants Voice Chair



For those of you with access to the internet you can now visit us on Facebook. Why not sign up and keep up to date with all the latest news and events.

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Suffolk Housing Society, Old Mission House, St Botolph's Lane, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 2AX

T: 01284 767224 F: 01284 701573 E: office@suffolkhousing.org www.suffolkhousing.org

Editor: Hazel Egan