

New 'one-stop' customer service

During the latter part of 2007 the Society carried out a review of our Customer Service functions. We looked at the way that people access our services, how we deliver them and what we could do to improve them. We broke down the services into specific areas and asked an external consultant to speak to some of our customers to identify where there were gaps in the service.

If you were one of the people who came along to focus group meetings with us or spoke to our consultant then we would like to say thank you for your time and comments, they were much appreciated.

Overall we found that there was a high level of satisfaction with the service that the Society provides, but there were some areas where we could improve so we have put things in place to address these areas.

The single biggest change that you will see from the beginning of April is a 'One Stop' Customer Service

function – this means that when you ring in to the general office number at the Society your query will be dealt with by a Customer Services Adviser who will be able to respond to a whole range of queries such as repair requests, rent account queries, housing enquiries and many others there and then rather than having to put you through to another department. We hope that this new approach will allow us to deal with the majority of calls at the first point of contact.

We have re-deployed some of our existing staff to these new posts and recruited new people as well.

Everyone in Suffolk Housing Society has a direct telephone line so you can still ring them directly if you need to. However, for all general enquiries you should call our main office number 01284 767224.

Under these new arrangements those wanting a visit from a housing officer can still ask for one.

The new customer services team



Joy Mayhew
Senior Customer Services Adviser



Hannah Jewers
Customer Services Adviser



Liz Brinkley
Customer Services Adviser

and Carl McKee
Customer Services Adviser

We will introduce you to the full team at a later date.

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Residents involved

As you will be aware from our previous publications we are very keen to meet with our residents. We want to know what you think and feel about a host of different issues. Early last year many of you completed our Tenant Satisfaction Survey and told us what you have a particular interest in and if you would be happy to come along to a meeting or be consulted in some other way. We have started to use this information and had a number of very successful meetings in the latter part of year.

As well as those involved in the Customer Service Review we'd like to mention the following:

- On the 2nd November we held our second Older Tenant Forum at the Cedar's Hotel in Stowmarket and 40 residents joined us to hear about Crime Prevention, Waste Recycling, the work of the CAB and Age Concern and a took part in a short exercise session.
- December was a busy month and started with a number of residents joining for a Disability Equality Group meeting. The aim of the meeting was to produce a Disability Equality Scheme and action plan. A number of residents with specific disabilities came into the office and were very helpful



in making suggestions, that can ensure the organisation makes reasonable adjustments so that all residents receive a fair and equal service.

- Also in December a small group of residents met to look at work that had been carried out through an internal review about how we carry out our day to day repairs, planned improvements and cyclical maintenance. One of the useful suggestions that came out of this meeting was that residents would find it helpful to know not just the current years improvement programme but also the following year's (see page 6 for more information about improvements).
- January saw a meeting of residents looking at our Resident Action Plan. We discussed why we need to

produce such an Action Plan and looked at what our priorities will be for 2008/09.

- Our most recent residents meeting was to discuss the Interlink magazine and decide what type of articles should be included. This small group of Joan Matthewman, Gillian Pugh and Paul Last have agreed to meet prior to each publication to suggest topics and themes for inclusion, but if you have a suggestion about the content of the magazine, please don't keep it to yourself, let the office know on 01284 767224.

Coming up next...

In March a group of residents have been invited to meet with contractors that have tendered for the grounds maintenance contract. They will hear a presentation from each company and have the opportunity to ask them questions.

We are carrying out three internal service reviews this year, one on Supported Housing another on Value for Money and we shall also be looking at Tenancy and Estate Management. There will be an opportunity for residents to take part in these later in the year so if you are interested in attending a focus group let your Housing Officer or Interlink editor, Hazel Egan know.



All change in the housing team!

As well as the changes happening in the Customer Service Team there are some changes also taking place in the Housing Team. We have taken the opportunity to re-organise the Housing Officer areas taking into account the internal office changes and the recent new growth in property in Sudbury and Ipswich. This will mean that from April your Housing Officer may have changed. All officers will be visiting sites and distributing new site visit schedules but here is a list of their numbers and the new areas they will be looking after:



Richard Harger
01284 773445

Brandon
Cambridge
Haverhill
Long Stanton
Mildenhall
Newmarket
Thetford
Weeting
West Stow



Rob Longfoot
01284 773439

Field View
Fornham House
Parkway House
St Marys Close
Tacon Close
The Pines
all sites in
Bury St Edmunds



Kirstie Banham
01284 773447

Brantham
Bures
Cavendish
Chelmondiston
Clare
Elmsett
Hadleigh
Hundon
Ipswich

- Bull Road
- Celestion Drive
- Culford Place
- Damselly Road
- Ditton Way
- Dragonfly Walk
- Hurricane Place
- Perkins Way
- Provan Court
- Spitfire Close

Long Melford
Pebmarsh
Shotley
Sroughton
Stanstead
Stratford St Mary
Sudbury



Dorothy Rood
01284 773437

Badwell Ash
Barrow
Beyton
Debden
Debenham
Elmswell
Hopton
Horringer
Ipswich

- Apsley Court
- Bloomfield Street
- Bromley Close
- Freehold Road
- Johnson Close
- Risby Close
- Sinclair Drive
- St Clements
- Stevenson Road
- Troon Gardens
- Woodbridge Road
- Wherstead Road

Kenninghall
Needham Market
Rattlesden
Stanton
Stowmarket
Stradbroke
Thorpe Morieux
Walsham
Wickhambrook
Woolpit

A few other staff changes

- **Mary Moeser**, who is currently our Housing Assistant, will start her new role as Arrears Assistant. She will be working alongside Ian Dodds advising people about their rent accounts.
- **Our Maintenance team** will be increasing with the arrival of Peter Dyson as a second Maintenance Inspector to work along side Richard Baker. You are likely to meet Peter if we are carrying out any planned works to your home such as painting, window or kitchen replacements.
- **Three new Business Support Assistants** will be working largely behind the scenes, although they will help the Customer Services Team if lines are busy – they will be Maureen Staff who many of you will know already, Joan Cannon and Emma Welsh.
- **The Housing team** are increasing in size. Rob Longfoot our current Housing Trainee will move over to be a Housing Officer when he finishes his qualification at the end of March and take on a patch making a total of four Housing Officers covering our properties. We will then, later in the year, look to recruit a new Housing Trainee to replace Rob.

We believe that the changes that we are making will improve our services further and hope that you will agree. If you would like to make any comments once the new arrangements are in place from April then contact Joy Mayhew who will be pleased to hear from you.

You said	We did
Residents at a scheme in Bury St Edmunds were having trouble with youths climbing over fences and walls and racing across gardens.	We worked with a Crime Reduction Officer and increased the height of the fences by adding trellis work and fixing a strip of prickly material to the wall.
A resident in Mildenhall wrote in to ask if the Society could consider providing a gate to give her and her family more privacy to a rear access pathway beside her house.	Under the Society's Estate Improvements fund it has been possible to supply and fit a timber gate.

Choice Based Lettings

Just a reminder that the new Choice Based Lettings scheme covering Cambridge City, Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury and South Cambridgeshire local authority areas is now up and running. In order to be considered for a move within these areas you must be registered with the scheme. You can register on-line or by contacting your local authority. Once you are registered and your housing situation has been assessed you will be able to 'bid' for a vacant property that you are interested in. For more information go to www.home-link.org.uk or speak to your Housing Officer.

Staff bits

After working with us for 4½ years our Customer Services Assistant, Brenda Berrill, made the decision to retire at the end of last year.

As one of our most popular members of staff we all miss Brenda very much but, of course, wish her a very happy retirement and thank her for all her hard work.



As most of our residents will know by now, we have an Employee of the Year award, which is presented at

the end of the year. This year we were delighted that the award went to Ian Dodds, our Arrears Controller, whose work both in keeping our rent arrears down and supporting and advising residents as to benefit entitlements, etc. when they are having difficulty managing their finances is exemplary.

The legal bits...

What happens on the death of a tenant?

For relatives who have to deal with the emotional and practical aspects of a death in the family, dealing with the status of a tenancy can add extra stress. It is important that the office is contacted, but the following key information may also be helpful

Joint Tenants

So that we can amend our records we will need to see a copy of the Death Certificate with correct information.

'Executor' or 'Next of Kin'

A notice to end a tenancy can only be served by an executor or the Society. If there is no executor to the estate the Society must be advised and will make the necessary arrangements to end the tenancy. An appointment will then be made to meet a representative at the property to give help and advice about clearing the property and returning the keys.

Please note that any Housing Benefit entitlement will cease from the date of death as the benefit is paid to the person not the property. Full rent will need to be payable until the end of the tenancy.



Gardening competition 2008

Spring is in the air and if you have a garden or plant up lots of pots and containers now is the time to be thinking about entering this years gardening competition – for more information please speak with your Housing Officer.

Dates for your diary!

The office will be closed

5th May – May Day

26th May – Spring Bank Holiday

If you have an emergency when the office is closed you should ring Invicta Telecare on 01732 781976.





Change of heating for residents in Bury St Edmunds

A number of householders in Bury St Edmunds have had their electric heating upgraded. The existing storage heaters were over 20 years old but as the properties also had a gas supply it was decided to offer gas central heating to those residents who wanted it. We worked closely with Anglia Energy Services

to provide the best tariffs for the gas and with the residents also the contractor, Gaswise, to ensure the programme ran smoothly. Residents have reported back high satisfaction levels with these improvements and have found the system much better to control.

Carrying out improvements?

A number of residents ask about making improvements to their home and want to know how to go about it. So what do you need to do if you want to make an improvement?

First you must ask for our permission, this should be in writing and should tell us what you are proposing to do and can include a small sketch.

We may visit you so we are clear about what you are asking before making a decision. We will not refuse our consent unless there is a good reason, but if we do say 'no' we will explain why.

When we give our permission we will do so in writing and provide you with a list of any conditions that must

be followed. These conditions are set out to protect you, your neighbours and the property.

You should follow this procedure for any improvement or alteration you are considering, for example:

- Putting up a TV aerial or Satellite dish
- Putting up CCTV or surveillance equipment
- Installing a shower
- Installing laminate flooring
- Adding or removing electrical sockets
- Fitting an external water tap

For more information about carrying out improvements please see page 22 of your Tenants Handbook.

New grounds maintenance contractor

From 1st April 2008 our new grounds maintenance contractor will be a company called Countrywide. This decision was made following a meeting with residents who had the opportunity to hear presentations from several contractors and ask them lots of questions about service delivery.



Current repair charges for tenants

We receive thousands of requests each year for repairs to be carried out and make every effort at the time of the request to establish the cause of the problem and how it occurred. We do this because in some instances it is the tenant's responsibility to carry out the work that is being requested – see your Tenants Handbook for more information.

Where it is your responsibility we have made things easier by setting a fixed price for work to be carried out by the Society. We have put together

a list of the most common repairs that are the tenant's responsibility and the charge. We would like you to pay for this at the time you request the work, but will discuss a payment arrangement with you if necessary.

Unblocking drains (where problem is caused by tenant)	£40
Lock change	£50
Boarding up window/door to make safe	£25
Re-glazing single glazed window	£65
Re-glazing double glazed window	£75

Gain entry if locked out	£25
Change light bulb/tube (where tenant is unable to carry out themselves)	£15
Call out to contractors where no fault is found	£25
Clear blockage to WC (where problem is caused by tenant)	£40
Replace internal door (not fire door)	£100
Gas check (for mutual exchanges)	£50 + vat (£58.75)
Electric check (for mutual exchanges)	£65 + vat (£76.37)

Planned maintenance in 2008

The following is a list of work that we intend to carry out during 2008. All residents at these addresses will be contacted separately when more specific information is available.

Bathrooms	Kitchens	Warden call	The Pightle
Banks Walk	St Marys Close	(Subject to review)	Various other works
Boilers	Westgate Street	Jubilee Court	Heatherset Close
Scotts Lodge	Cullum Road	Oakes Close	Windows
Electric heating upgrade	Banks Walk	Greatfields	Armstrong Close
The Pightle	The Pightle	Lewis Close	
	Heatherset Close	Cullum Road	

Properties to be externally painted or to be washed down for UPVC properties in 2008

Badwell Ash	Long Melford
Orchard Way	Theobalds Close
Beccles	Mildenhall
St Michaels Lodge	Crossways
Brantham	Shotley
Gravel Pit Lane	Queensland
Bury St Edmunds	Stowmarket
Abbeygate Street	Edgar Avenue
Oakes Close	Hill Rise
Parkway House	Jubilee Avenue
St Stephen's Close	Rattlesden Close
Wren Close	Sudbury
Chelmondiston	New Cut
Mill Field	Rosemary Gardens
Elmswell	The Pines
Laurel Court	Uplands Road
Haverhill	Thorpe Morieux
Apple Acre	Greatfield
Brybank Road	Whepstead
Hopton	Rectory Road
Lewis Close	Winterton On Sea
Ipswich	The Old Rectory
Damselby Road	
Dragonfly Walk	
Emperor Circle	

Planned maintenance in 2009

The following is a list of work that we are proposing to carry out during 2009. You should note that at the moment this work has not been formally agreed and may be subject to change. A confirmed list will be published early in 2009.

Bathrooms	Boilers	Apsley Court
Bury Court	Cumberland Avenue	Kitchens
Culford Place	Electric heating upgrades	Emily Frost Close
St Giles Court	Parkway House	Parkway House
Jubilee Court	Emily Frost Close	Apsley Court

Properties to be electrically tested in 2008

Bury St Edmunds	Ipswich
Gloucester Road	Johnson Close
Hospital Road	Wherstead Road
St Georges Court	Mildenhall
St Stephens Close*	Cobblers Court
Cavendish	Newmarket
Genevill Close	Willow Crescent*
Hadeligh	Thetford
Calais Street*	Ben Culey Drive*
Monastery Court*	Weeting
Haverhill	Hall Close
Charrington Close*	Whepstead
Overchurch Close	Rectory Road*
Hundon	Woolpit
Lower Road	Mill Lane
Seabrook Close*	

*Communal Areas only

New windows for properties in Wickhambrook and Ringsfield

The Society has completed a window replacement programme for 30 properties. This involved removing the old single glazed wooden windows and installing new white UPVC double glazed windows. The old windows had come to the end of their useful life and had started to require frequent repairs. The cost of the contract was £52,000. One resident reported back: 'The whole job was brilliant, God bless and thank you'.



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