

Welcome to our new chief executive

The society's new chief executive has pledged to continue providing all of our tenants with an excellent service when he takes the hotseat early next year.

Ian Winslet will take over the reins in January from Steve Clarke, who will step down after 29 years at the helm. He joins the society from CCHA (Croydon Churches Housing Association) where he has been chief executive for past 18 months. Ian said, "Steve has done a fabulous job at the Society and his commitment and personal drive over such a long period is a rare thing these days and a real credit to him. I look forward to taking his work forward with what I already know is a great staff team, active Tenants Voice and ambitious Board"

Ian started his career as an environmental health officer, and amongst many other things enforced legal standards in private rented bedsits in Hammersmith. "This is where I really starting to understand the need for good quality homes and the powerful role that organisations such as SHS and tenants play in improving housing". After this, he held a variety of local authority posts and ended up running a council housing department in Kent before moving to CCHA, initially as operations director, ten years ago.

Born in Balham, Ian has only ever lived in London and is relishing the opportunity of swapping the town for rural Suffolk. In his spare time he plays what he describes as a "mediocre"

standard of club badminton and at 45 years old has just taken up water skiing (!) much to the amusement of his teenage son.



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Hello to you

The number of properties we own in Ipswich grew in November as the Society purchased 70 homes from Viridian Housing. We now have a new sheltered housing scheme off Spring Road which we are renaming Trafalgar House and 20 houses across the town. We are making plans to visit all our new residents early in December and looking forward to getting to know you all.

Budding designers chance to Bloom

Suffolk Housing Society working together with Havebury Housing Partnership will be supporting a design competition early next year for 16 – 20 year olds.

The competition which will be promoted in the local press by St Edmundsbury council and Bury In Bloom will be looking for the best landscape design for the two roundabouts on Parkway in Bury. The Risbygate roundabout and the Kings Road roundabout are linked by existing planting down Parkway in front of the Cineworld complex – the competition winner will come up with designs that can continue that link and improve the appearance of two busy roundabouts. As well as a substantial prize, the winner will see their designs built.

Keep an eye open in the local press for more details about the competition. It would be great if a resident of either the Society or Havebury came up with the winning design.



Stop Press!

There have been a number of announcements recently by the government about changes to tenancies. This is obviously very worrying for many people but we would like to reassure you that these changes are being considered for new tenants signing new tenancy agreements and should not affect any of our current tenants. If you have any concerns that you want to discuss contact your housing officer or ring our customer service team on 01284 767224.

Staying Warm in Winter

Last winter was the coldest recorded for over 30 years, with an average temperature of just above 2 °C. It's important to keep warm over winter months to prevent common illness such as cold and flu, and in more severe cases pneumonia.



Here are some simple steps you can take to help stay warm and healthy:

- Keep the heating throughout your home to a consistent temperature of at least 16°C.
- Keep doors closed to any rooms you do not heat. Failure to do so may not only result in wasted heat, but could cause mould growth to cold surfaces.
- If your heating system is programmable, set the timer to come on prior to getting up so you're not cold whilst waiting for your home to heat.
- Adjust your heating settings according to the weather. If you know the temperature is set to dip below freezing, increase the temperature and timer settings accordingly.

For elderly residents seeking further advice and information on staying warm this winter contact your nearest 'age uk' branch who are currently running a 'spread the warmth' campaign.

Sustainability Workgroup

It is well over a year since staff, residents and board members set up a Sustainability Workgroup. The purpose of the group was to look at the Society's work to ensure that where possible we were being as "green" as possible.



The main areas considered were:

- **Residents living environment**
- **Managing existing home and estates**
- **Office /working environment**
- **Major works projects**

Work carried out so far includes:

- A Sustainability Strategy developed by the working group has been approved by the Board
- An energy performance audit is being carried out so we can establish how energy efficient our properties are
- A number of articles on saving energy and recycling have been published in Interlink
- A consultation about cleaning has been carried out and it was agreed that there would be no reduction to this service
- We are about to pilot the use of plunger taps to communal standpipes to help prevent vandalism and reduce water usage
- We are about to pilot replacing lighting with sensors to monitor the effect on running costs before making a decision to roll out this type of lighting to all schemes.

- Obtained external funding to install air source heat pumps to one of our schemes.

In the office we have set up an Eco group and through them we have:

- Reduced the thermostat on the heating system
- Fitted a water hippo to reduce water usage
- Reviewed all printer settings to ensure documents are printed out using both sides of paper
- Encouraged all staff to think before they print

- Set up an improved paper/card/plastic recycling scheme
- Invited an external agency to carry out an efficiency audit of the office and where practicable have acted on their recommendations.

The Sustainability group will meet again next year and the Eco group will continue to monitor what's happening in the office.

Why not let us know what you have been doing to reduce, reuse and recycle, we can share your ideas with our readers.

One of our reindeer is missing!!

Help – hidden somewhere in this issue is a little reindeer, can you help us find him? Let us know where you think he is hiding and you could be in with a chance of winning vouchers to the value of £25. This competition is open to all ages, so why not start looking now. If entering by email simply send your name and address and phone number and if under 18, your age, together with the page number and a brief description of where he is to the office to hazel@suffolkhousing.org, alternatively send the information in to our office using the address on the back of the newsletter. Let us know where you think he is by Friday 28th January 2011.

Ways to source cheaper fuel

With recent announcements from major energy suppliers, fuel prices are set to increase yet again causing more households to fall into Fuel Poverty. To help reduce your energy bills, have you searched around for the most competitive fuel rates energy suppliers have to offer? If not you could be saving £'s by carrying out a few simple steps.

Here's a brief guide of checks: (Please note that offers and varying tariffs from suppliers are constantly changing and there is no consistently cheap solution.)

Electricity/Gas

- Discounts can be made by sourcing both your electric and gas from the same supplier.
- Online saver tariffs seem to be the cheapest option available. If you're currently receiving paper bills on a quarterly basis and have access to the internet, change now.
- Use comparison websites. There are many sites available which will automatically search for the best deal to suit your circumstances.
- Try to avoid pre-pay meters at all costs. You may be able to manage your money more effectively this way, but you will be paying a premium for the privilege. You



could also find it difficult to revert back to a standard debit meters.

Electricity

Avoid using portable electrical appliances as they will run using 'On Peak' electricity rates. If you do need to use additional appliances you may find an oil filled electric heater will provide you with a more efficient and cost effective form of heating.

Gas

Avoid using portable Calor Gas heaters which can be dangerous and generate excess moisture within the home which can also contribute to mould problems. Calor Gas heaters will be an additional cost on top of your existing heating system.

Oil

Oil is an expensive fuel to purchase so look out for the cheapest options available. Websites such as Boilerjuice.com and Cheapestoil.co.uk will be able to assist you.

DON'T MISS OUT

Cold Weather, and Winter Fuel Payments may be available to you if you're over 60, disabled or on a low income. Contact your local job centre for more details.



Resident Involvement Page

Welcome to our brand new page for Resident Involvement! This page aims to update residents on the various opportunities to get involved with the work we at Suffolk Housing do. We want our tenants to be at the heart of our business and help us to improve our services.

It's been a very busy and exciting last few months meeting many of you. In September we held a very successful Meet and Greet where prospective members were able to meet current Tenants Voice members and find out more about joining the Tenants Voice. Tenants Voice is a very influential group who have

representatives on our board and therefore can make a real difference. If you would like to find out more please don't hesitate to contact me for an informal chat using my contact details below.

We had a great response from our readers panel when we asked them to review our Tenants Handbook. Tenants sent in their opinions and we also invited some of them to come and talk to us about how they think we can improve our handbook. All of the comments were very helpful and will help influence the way the handbook looks and what information it contains.

Recently we asked you what you thought of our Grounds Maintenance service. Clearly this is an important issue for many of our tenants and this was reflected by the huge amounts of feedback received. A big thank you to everyone who responded.

The Society now has its very own Facebook site. The site contains lots of useful information and you can also send us comments or queries and we will aim to respond to you as soon as we can. You can reach the site by clicking on the link available at www.suffolkhousing.org.



Mystery Shoppers

We need our services tested from time to time to make sure that we meet the standards we have set ourselves, Therefore we need volunteers to help test us!

Once you have registered with us as a Mystery Shopper, we will ask you to test one of our services and then give us your opinion on how we did.

We provide full training and there are vouchers up for grabs!

If this sounds like your thing, please contact our Tenant Liaison Officer on 01284 767224.

Editorial and Readers Panel

Do you have an eye for detail? We produce a lot of important documents and it is essential that we produce them in a style that is informative and easy to understand for all our tenants.

We need volunteers to work with us to help design and proof read our documents. You may only be invited to a meeting occasionally, mostly we would send you documents to your home and discuss them with you.

If this sounds like something that might interest you, please contact our Tenant Liaison officer: Tel. 01284 767224, E-mail: jonathan@suffolkhousing.org or write to: Suffolk Housing Society, Old Mission House, St Botolphs Lane, Bury St Edmunds IP33 2AX



Back to Basics

You should all have received a copy of our Back to Basics report that sets out how the Society is performing against a number of criteria that we have to meet. The document shows that this is a work in progress and we would very much appreciate your feedback both in terms of the report itself, for example, ... did you find it easy to read? Was it informative? etc and also whether you have any comments or suggestions about how we can address areas where we may not be hitting the target at the moment.

If you would like to give us your comments then please contact Jonathan Routledge, our Tenant Liaison Officer, on 01284 715391 or by e-mail to: Jonathan@suffolkhousing.org and let us know what you think or what you would like us to do to improve things in your area.

You are not a number...

Our census is not quite as grand as the national census, which for those of you who are interested will happen again in 2011, but it does give us an opportunity to gather useful information about our customers – you – which in turn can help shape how we do things.

If we know:

- which of our residents struggle to read our information we can make sure we send it in an appropriate format
- how many of our residents have disabilities we can make sure we review our aids and adaptations budgets with this in mind
- which of our residents are stay at home mums with school age children we can arrange appointments during school hours
- how many of our residents are working full time we can consider alternative visit arrangements.



But...if we don't know these things we can't do it.

If you still have your form in a drawer or pinned on the fridge please fill it in and return it to us. If you have misplaced your form but know you didn't return it just let us know – we can fill it in over the phone or arrange for someone to visit you to collect the information in person. Ring your housing officer or customer service team on 01284 767224, send us a text 07797800661 or an email to customerservices@suffolkhousing.org

Please help us to help you!



Meet and Greet evening

I'd like to take this opportunity to give you a quick round up of what Tenants Voice has been up to recently. On 29th September we held a Meet & Greet event with Suffolk Housing. This was advertised to tenants who had expressed an interest in Tenants Voice. It gave them an opportunity to speak to members in an informal way, and find out more about being involved, either as a member of TV, or as a Tenants Friend.

We had a very successful evening, with lots of interest shown by the tenants who attended. Jonathan Routledge, the Tenant Liaison Officer and Hazel Egan, Housing Services Manager, welcomed us all and were happy to answer any questions. I was pleased to see James, a young man of 15 attend, and show such an interest in

becoming a member. He could become our first teenage representative!

As chair of the group I felt that the interest shown was very encouraging. I am hoping that we get some new members who can contribute to the work we do, particularly the excellent input we have been able to provide to the 'Back to Basics' document, the Annual Report for Tenants, which has been compiled with information from tenants. We'd now like to know what you think about the report and the promises that have been made about service delivery. Why not drop me a line or send me an email to let me know what you think?

Susan Feary, TV Chairman

Frequently Asked Questions to Customer Services



Customer Service Team are always happy to help with your questions but here are a few of the most frequently asked questions and responses.

Can I exchange house with another tenant?

Normally yes although you must have a secure or assured tenancy, not a starter tenancy. You would be expected to have a clear rent account and both parties must move into accommodation suitable for their needs i.e. a single person cannot move into a two bedroomed property. If you want more information we have a leaflet available, please ring 01284 767224 to request one.

I have a joint tenancy with my partner and she has moved out, how do I get her name removed from the tenancy?

It is important for you to take the right action because while both parties remain on the tenancy they both have the right to occupy the property and both are responsible for payment of the rent. You need to seek legal advice, either through a solicitor or contact Citizens Advice Bureau. With the help of your legal advisor, you must either seek a court order "vesting" the tenancy into sole name under s.53 Schedule 7 Family Law Act 1996 or, if you are getting divorced, a property transfer order allowing your tenancy to be "assigned" to you from both your names under s.24 Matrimonial Causes Act 1973

Can I pay my rent by credit or debit card?

Yes, if you have access to the internet you should go to www.suffolkhousing.org, click on the icon on the left hand side of the screen 'Pay your rent', and then click 'On line payment' on the right hand side of the screen and follow instructions given.

If you do not have internet available ring 01284 767224 or call into our offices between 9am and 5.30pm and customer services will be happy to take your payment.

Would you like £5,000 to spend?

Of course you would and all you have to do is apply for an application form from Suffolk Housing Society.

Is there a catch? I hear you say.

No, but the money has to be used to benefit your community. Have you ever thought that some landscaping or seating would improve your gardens? How about a greenhouse and gardening tools, a nice new flat screen TV for your communal area, improvements to a play area perhaps. All of these things and more are possible with the help of Suffolk Housing Society's Community Chest. Grants of up to £5,000 are available and we still have £20,000 left to give away. It is over a year ago since Suffolk Housing Society set aside £35,000 to celebrate their 35th anniversary and below are examples of those who have benefited so far.

Field View Thurston

Sound and video equipment, large screen and hire of Thurston's Community Centre for fortnightly film shows. Funding for exercise classes.

St Mary's Close, Mildenhall

Greenhouse and garden furniture.

Fornham House, Ipswich

Brand new modern gazebo.

If you have an idea of a scheme to improve your local community please apply to Suffolk Housing Society for an application form. Do not be put off by the thought of a lengthy form to complete as it is not a complicated one. Your application goes to a panel that will be able to give you an answer to your application very quickly.

Remember, £5,000 could be yours.



Healthy Ambitions Suffolk – Walk a Million Steps Challenge



Two teams from Suffolk Housing have entered the Healthy Ambitions Suffolk Walk a Million Steps Challenge. This innovative challenge encourages staff to get together and walk their way to better health.

The competition has attracted more than 200 teams from across the county. Teams have to rise to the challenge of walking one million steps in a month and the team which clocks up the highest total of steps

winning a Wii for use in their workplace.

To hit the target, teams need to walk at least 10,000 steps on five days of the week for four consecutive weeks.

With 10 days to go at the time of writing, the Suffolk Strollers (Sue Philp, Ian Dodds, Heidi Adams, Kirstie Banham, and Kathy Boxall), have already notched up 980,311 steps between them, putting them 21st out of 206 and in with a good chance of winning (we hope!). The Trailblazers (Liz Brinkley, Emma Lally, Angela Yaxley, Joan Cannon, and Karen Moore) are trailing slightly with 598,729 steps but are hoping that christmas shopping trips over the last few days will increase their score.

Sue Philp, Operations Director said : “ We were delighted to be included in this exciting challenge from Healthy Ambitions Suffolk not only to promote the health benefits of walking but also as a fun way to help build teamwork and encourage healthy competition along the way.”

If you want to find out more about Healthy Ambitions Suffolk, including trying their free online health manager – an interactive tool that assesses your current level of health and gives you an action plan for improvement – visit their website below.

<http://www.healthyambitionssuffolk.nhs.uk/>



Diary dates

Office closed

Monday 27th December

Tuesday 28th December

Monday 3rd January 2011

Tuesday 25th January 9.30am till 1pm



Note for your diary...

One of our tenants will be celebrating a significant birthday in a rather special way next year. Jim Wilding, who has recently stood down from Tenants Voice, is planning to cycle from Land's End to John O'Groats in June 2011 and hopes to raise lots of money for Cancer Research. The event is still in its early days of preparation but Jim is looking for volunteers and helpers as well as donations to make this a success. If you think this is something you can help with let the office know and we will pass your details on to Jim. Oh and by the way the significant birthday...70 years young!

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