New Responsive Repairs Contractor!

We are very excited to announce that from 1st December 2014, Foster will become our new repairs and maintenance contractor, delivering our voids and responsive repair service.

Over the past year we have been reviewing various options to deliver the repairs service due to existing contractual arrangements expiring at the end of the year. Being a member of Eastern Procurement Ltd, a consortium of Social Landlords throughout East Anglia, provided us with the opportunity to select contractors directly from their procurement framework. Foster was successfully appointed to the Responsive Repairs framework as part of a tender process evaluated by the consortium’s landlords and tenant’s representatives in 2012. Overall, Foster scored highest, in both quality and cost, proving the most Value for Money contractor.

Who is Foster?

Foster were established in 2004 and have since become specialists in the Social Housing maintenance sector. They have recently formed part of the Lakehouse Group who provides similar construction and maintenance services predominantly to homes, schools and public buildings in London and the South East.

Foster have various depots, a Head Office within East Anglia and a customer base to match providing many similar maintenance contracts to social housing providers.

Why change Contractors?

Our existing contractual arrangements with Trevor Benton and Suffolk Electrical Services naturally expire at the end of the year. Both contractors have successfully provided a responsive repairs service for Suffolk Housing over the past 6 years.

New changes to the Repairs Service

The new contract will see changes in the way we deliver our repairs service which will include:

- A dedicated repairs contact centre managed by Foster
- Appointment focused repair system at the time you report repairs
- Contractor focused approach on first time fix
- Out of hours repairs calls managed by Foster

You can still report repairs in the same way.

By mobile app
By calling: 01284 767224
By visiting: www.suffolkhousing.org
News in brief

Phone App

We have upgraded our phone app and it will shortly have a facelift to mirror our branding. If you have a smart phone or tablet – why not download it and make getting in touch with us that little bit easier? Just search ‘Suffolk Housing’ on the ‘app store’ or ‘google play’ – it’s free and easy to use!

Top Performance

Since January 2014, we have shaved 13.8 days off our average time for letting empty properties! We have reduced it from an average of 21.5 days to just 7.7 days in September – increasing our income from rents, which can be ploughed back into improving services and building more homes! We will shortly be welcoming a new voids administrator to the team and we hope to become the top performing Housing Provider in the region!

Annual Report

Published in October by new marketing company Trident Marketing, it is on our Website or you can ask for a hard copy via customer services.

Giving a little help to children in Kenya

Suffolk Housing made a small donation to assist Ormiston Sudbury Academy students travel to Kenya to help in a project to provide schools for local communities.

Suffolk Housing Charity Cycle Ride

We hit our target of £5,000! A cheque was presented to the Special Care Baby Unit. A huge thank you to everyone who sponsored the team and to the riders and support crew that made it such a successful event.

New roles and new staff

Newcomers

Viv Kent - Purchase Ledger Administrator (temp to permanent) - Already with us!
Wayne Tatlow - Income Recovery Manager - Starting 3rd November 2014
Maia Meekings - Business Support Apprentice - Starting 3rd November 2014
David Byrnand - ICT Project Manager - Starting 4th November 2014
Sara Durham - Health & Safety Advisor - Starting 10th November 2014
Samantha Rackham - Voids Administrator - Starting 24th November 2014
Annette Giles - Human Resources Advisor - Starting 1st December 2014

Movers

Trish Mills - Customer Services Advisor to Arrears Controller - Started
Dylan Waters - Business Support Apprentice to Database Administrator - Started
Bob Hardiker - Scheme Manager Parkway House to Sheltered and Supported Team Leader (South) - Started
Paula Flynn - Scheme Manager Charles Jewson Court to Sheltered and Supported Team Leader (North) - Started
Samantha Almond - Scheme Manager St Mary’s Close to Scheme Manager St Mary’s Close and Parkway House - Started
Angela Vasley - Customer Services Advisor to Arrears Support Officer - Starting 1st December

Vacant Positions

Business Support Assistant | Customer Services Advisor | Scheme Manager, Charles Jewson Court | Scheme Manager, The Venlaw

Get to know your staff

Kehinde Odunlami

Give three words that best describe you? Friendly, loyal and adventurous.

What super power would you like to have? I want super powers so I can fly. I would then be able to travel the world for free!

Your favourite film? Toy story.

Your favourite three songs? Dr hook - Beautiful Woman, Meghan Trainor - All About The Bass and Pharrell Williams - Happy.

What was the last book you read? I don’t really read books as I never find the time, so thinking back I believe I read Barbra Teater - An Introduction to Applying Social Work Theories and Methods.

Paula Flynn, Team Leader North, Sheltered and Supported Housing.
Leading the way

Suffolk Housing continues to grow and spread its wings within Sheltered and Supported Housing.

Our footprint now covers Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and as we aim to provide excellent homes and services with a local friendly focus, that can sometimes be challenging for one person to deliver. Our Sheltered and Supported Housing tenants are very important to us and we want to be able to respond to their needs as quickly as possible, therefore we have introduced 2 new Team Leader posts. Paula Flynn covers part of Suffolk, including our Lowestoft Sheltered Housing, as well as all of our Sheltered and Supported Housing in Norfolk.

Bob Hardiker covers West Suffolk, Ipswich and Felixstowe. Some of you may already know Paula and Bob as they have both worked as SibHEME Managers and are very experienced. Both Team Leaders predominantly deal with day to day matters within Sheltered and liaise with the variety of Supported Housing projects where Suffolk Housing is the landlord.

It is likely you will see them on their travels at your scheme as they go around getting to know you all, or looking for a “pit stop” to grab a quick cup of tea!

Top prize for talented tenant

Sarah Devine, who lives in Crayford Road, was given first prize in the best planter category and overall winner of this year’s competition after receiving excellent feedback from judges. It is the second time Sarah has been recognised for her floral flair, as she received top prize for her planter in a Suffolk Housing gardening contest held last year.

Sarah, who has been a keen gardener for the past 15 years, was delighted with her win. She said: “I was so overwhelmed you would think I had won the Lottery! I was so surprised.”

Sarah sketches out her ideas for her garden on paper before she begins planting and aims to include as many colourful plants as she can. She is already planning her garden for next year.

“I find gardening very therapeutic,” she added. “It’s so nice up here where you’re surrounded by flowers and can hear the birds singing.”

Martin Barnes-Smith, tenant liaison officer with Suffolk Housing, said: “We were delighted to hear of Sarah’s success in this year’s Sudbury in Bloom competition. It makes it official – Suffolk Housing tenants really do have the best gardens! Well-kept, colourful gardens can make such a difference to people’s surroundings so we are always pleased to hear when our tenants are going the extra mile to create a welcoming, attractive outside space.”

“Hello my name is Gillian Pugh and I am the New Chair of Tenants Voice. I would like to thank Susan Feary for the wonderful work that she did while being Tenants Voice chair. Thank you Susan.

Here at Tenants Voice we have had a wonderful year bringing Tenants Voice forward, some members have new areas to lead on:- Michael Saunders, Lowestoft – Editorial & Readers Lead, Rosey Martin, Ipswich – Estate Improvement Scheme Lead, Joan Mattewman, Barrow, Tenant Friend Lead. We all look forward to expanding our roles and working with tenants right across Suffolk Housing. To do this we need new members and as such are always looking for new people to join us, so whether you are 18 or 90 or anywhere in between you would be very welcome. Please contact me at Gillian.Pugh@suffolkhousing.org

Finally, Tenants Voice would like to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and when you’re making your New Years resolution give us a try and you might find that this is one resolution you can keep.”

Gillian Pugh (Chair Tenants Voice)

“My name is Jackie Jordan. I have lived in Sudbury since April. I became involved with Tenants Voice shortly afterwards. I am now the secretary as well as a Tenants Friend. It is a great way to become involved and meet new people in my area along with other Tenants Voice members. I didn’t know what to expect when I first started but I was made really welcome and have loved every minute.”

Jackie Jordan (Secretary Tenants Voice)

“My name is Gillian Nihill and I am a Tenants Friend for London Road, Ipswich. I enjoy my role and I feel that all tenants can come to me with any concerns and I can put any questions or queries to the Tenants Voice Panel, which I am also involved with.”

Gillian Nihill (Tenants Voice & Tenants Friend)

“Not related to Tenants Voice, but more to the Estate Improvement Scheme at Jubilee Court, Bury St Edmunds. Picnic benches and a BBQ have been greatly appreciated by quite a few tenants and utilisation during our fine summer has been immense. Also a word or two about Tenants Voice will allow me to covert my position to Chair at this time. I would like to thank Gill for her work as it is needed and I would like to continue the work and carry on for the next year or two. I have enjoyed my time as Chair and I would like to say thank you to all the members and the new ones that have been added to the team. I would like to say thank you to all the members and the new ones that have been added to the team. I would also like to say thank you to all the members and the new ones that have been added to the team.

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**Reaping the benefits of learning new skills**

Over the last year or so residents have been learning new skills to help them to have a bigger say in things and make Suffolk Housing more accountable to residents.

Admittedly, so far this hasn’t extended to circus tricks such as juggling (next time maybe!) but members of the Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSC) and Tenants Voice (TV) have attended training courses ranging from running focus groups to presentation and public speaking, and you and Suffolk Housing are now reaping the benefits.

The training programme was run by The Linchpin Project, a tenant-run community interest company, based in Cambridge. It was designed to be practical and provided plenty of opportunities for residents to try out new skills amongst friends before putting them to use for real. After all, it can be quite daunting interviewing managers or running focus groups with residents for the first time. The courses were well received, averaging a 9+ rating out of 10 from the residents who attended them. Andy Sage, the lead trainer, met with the RSC and Martin Barnes-Smith, The Tenant Liaison Officer to identify their training needs, and tailored it to their specific requirements.

Andy is thrilled with how well things have gone: “I’ve thoroughly enjoyed watching the residents develop and fine tune their skills. They firmly grasped the opportunity to learn with both hands. This has not only benefited them as individuals but more importantly means Suffolk Housing now faces proper challenge through the RSC and the other involvement structures. The way Suffolk Housing has responded to being challenged has been brilliant, the staff and the Board have positively embraced this new way of working and are enthusiastically collaborating with the RSC to make service improvements.”

On the back of the training provided by The Linchpin Project, the RSC has completed two robust scrutiny reviews, the first on the grounds maintenance service and the second on rent arrears. The RSC produced two reports setting out the resident viewpoint, painstakingly evidencing their findings to support their conclusions and recommendations for service improvement.

Lucy Allen, the Chair of RSC says the training has been a real success. She said, “The work of the RSC is both challenging and rewarding at the same time. The early training helped us to understand what our role was and where we fitted into things but after the grounds maintenance scrutiny review we realised we needed practical training on how to perform our role more effectively. The follow-up training included topics such as interviewing and questioning, work shadowing, report writing, etc. and has definitely helped us to improve our skills and confidence and fulfil our potential individually and collectively as a committee.”

The next training programme is in the process of being pulled together by Andy and will cover topics such as getting under the skin of performance information, chairing and leadership skills, how to undertake site inspections and surveys, equality and diversity and much more besides.

The skills you could learn are transferable to other aspects of your life such as applying for jobs, getting that long overdue promotion at work, convincing your lovely but idle teenage son to tidy his bedroom or simply having the confidence to express yourself to others to get heard, etc. Clearly the benefits of the training are there for all to see; our residents are having a bigger say, Suffolk Housing is more accountable than ever before and this is leading to real improvements for residents in terms of better services. The residents themselves also benefit through learning new skills that can be used in other walks of life.

Find out more about the programme or how to get involved call Martin Barnes-Smith on 01284 715391

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**William Flack Opening**

On 20th November 2014, the official opening of William Flack Place, Whepstead took place, 100 years after the start of World War One.

The scheme was named after William Flack, who was born in 1875, and was the first member of the Suffolk Regiment to be killed in action in the Great War. He lived at Mickley Green, Whepstead, just down from where William Flack Place has been built. He was killed on 23rd August 1914, which coincided with the date that the first new residents of William Flack Place moved in, in 2014.

The ceremony was attended by current members of the Royal Anglian Regiment bearing Standards; as well as descendants of William Flack, residents of the scheme, Iceni Homes and other local interested parties. A tree was planted, poppy seeds were scattered and a plaque unveiled.

**Communal bins at Apsley Court, Ipswich**

**Kelly Swift - Resident Scrutiny Committee Member.**

I am a resident at Apsley court in Ipswich and I have had problems with our communal bins in our area. The bins were placed next to my flat and they were sitting by my bathroom and bedroom wall, which was very unpleasant in the summer as I couldn’t open my bathroom window because of the smell that came from them due to the hot weather, also there were flies which liked to come through and it was very frustrating.

The dustbin men come round to empty the bins and they used to push the bins back very hard and use to hit my bedroom wall and wake me up at 6.30 in the morning, which I really didn’t appreciate as I am not a morning person.

In the end I spoke to my housing officer about this situation and asked if there was anything that they could do and they said they could move them over the other end of the car park which I was very happy about.

They had to dig up an area to build an enclosed area so the bins could fit and didn’t move around so much, with a ramp for disabled residents, which I am myself.

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I am very happy with the results, it also looks a lot better for the area as I am sure other local people could smell the rubbish in the summer which was not very pleasant for them.
Resident Scrutiny Committee (RSC)

‘I joined RSC when it started in 2013, I currently chair the group and I have found the whole experience really interesting. Suffolk Housing have opened the doors to tenants welcoming us in and answering the questions we ask, making changes we recommend where they can. I think it’s a real opportunity for Suffolk Housings’ tenants to have a say in the way the organisation is run and the priorities it has. The team I work with are really friendly and although we have a lot of work to do I think we do so in an informal relaxed way.’

Lucy Allen
(Chair Resident Scrutiny Committee)

‘The reason why I joined the RSC was to see if I could make a difference to the residents that live within the Suffolk Housing community. I myself love interacting with people from all departments and seeing if I can help implement change within Suffolk Housing for the better to benefit residents and also help Suffolk Housing to build better communication with its residents and the people that I deal with on a daily basis.’

Thomas Robinson
(Resident Scrutiny Committee)

‘I grew up on a council estate watching my parents hold a community together and fighting for their rights. I have always been aware that not everyone can do this. I like to make sure as many people receive the help and support they need to live a healthy clean life. When I was given the opportunity to join Servite/Viridian I jumped at the chance. When Suffolk Housing purchased our home I was able to transfer my skills to good use. I feel our team really have made a difference and is taking an active role in shaping our future. ”

Michelle Symonds
(Vice Chair Resident Scrutiny Committee)