

tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'
community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Spring 2022



**Introducing your new repairs
and maintenance service**

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What would you like to read in TLC?

This magazine is all about tenants, leaseholders and the housing services you're at the heart of.

If you have an idea for a story or want to let us know your views on the magazine, we'd love to hear from you!

Send your comments to

**communications@
norwich.gov.uk**



If you would like this information in another language or format such as large print, CD or Braille please visit www.norwich.gov.uk/Intran or call 0344 980 3333.

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Norwich City Council



Introduction from Councillor Gail Harris

Welcome to the spring issue of TLC magazine

Deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing

Welcome to the spring issue of TLC magazine. I know that these have not been the easiest of times, but I hope that like me you are looking forward to the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

I am pleased that this issue provides an opportunity to welcome back the repairs and maintenance service as we bring back further services under more direct council control. You can find out more about how the council will approach property management from April, and learn about the services set to be provided by council-owned company Norwich City Services Ltd (NCSL) on page four.

As we approach the new financial year the council is also in the final stages of agreeing

its budget for the 12 months ahead. This includes setting rent levels for over 14,000 tenants living in council homes. As you'll read on page five, we are proposing a rent increase in line with guidance from central government and what's required to fulfil our commitments as a housing service.

It is important that we keep residents updated with the way the housing service is performing, how we are spending allocated budgets and the difference we are making with the housing we provide. Highlights from the latest annual report can be found on pages six and seven.

As well as investing in the properties you live in, we are also making improvements to the digital side of the housing

service which has a huge influence on the way you interact with us and on the efficiency of the work we do. You can read more about our new housing portal on page nine.

As always, we are keen to hear from all residents on the housing service and your experience as a council tenant, a topic discussed at a recent tenant involvement meeting. Find out more about how you can join the conversation on page 10.

Finally, improving the look and feel of our estates is something I am particularly passionate about so I am always delighted to receive updates on completed projects. You can see some examples of the latest work on page 11.



Reshaping our repairs and maintenance service

Repairs and maintenance services currently organised by NPS Norwich and carried out by Norwich Norse Building will be brought back under more direct council control from Friday 1 April.

This is to give the council and our residents more say in the way the services are run and help us identify areas for improvement.



What this means for residents

The way you report repairs will not be affected by this change.

Correspondence you've had regarding building repairs or maintenance on your home previously sent by NPS Norwich will come from the council as of April.

Work previously carried out by Norwich Norse Building will be carried out by Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) – a new company wholly owned by the city council set up to deliver services on our behalf. NCSL is already providing environmental services around the city.

You will continue to hear from sub-contractors such as Gasway and other specialist companies appointed to complete specific work.

All correspondence should be clearly branded and anyone attending an appointment at your home will have identification. Do not hesitate to contact the council if you do not feel confident about someone's identity.

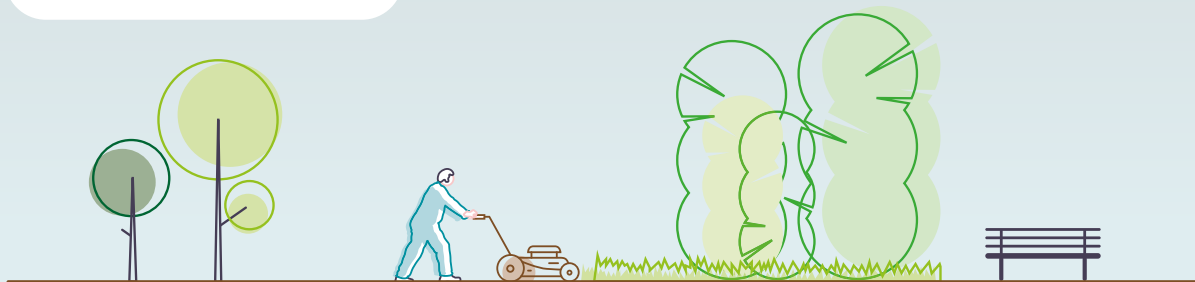
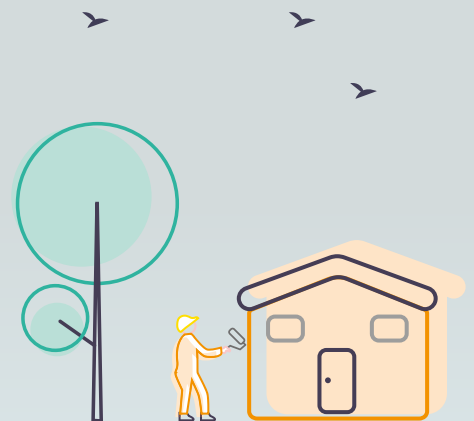
Looking ahead

Our main priority is to make sure these services are transferred as smoothly as possible.

The next steps will be to work with NCSL to identify how these services can be developed, with a three-year improvement plan as part of the new arrangements.

We're committed to developing plans for better and meaningful engagement with residents on the management of the new contract with NCSL and development of the wider housing service.

See page 10 for ways you can already get involved.



Rent increase explained

Norwich City Council tenancy rents will rise by 4.1 per cent for the 2022-23 financial year, representing an average increase of £3.30 per week.

	2021-22 weekly rent	Proposed 2022-23 weekly rent	Proposed increase
Average	£80.40	£83.69	£3.30

The proposed increase in rent will vary between properties. The minimum increase in weekly rent will be £2.35 and the maximum increase will be £5.85.

Why are rents being increased?

The government states that social housing providers can raise social rents in line with the rate of inflation in the previous September, which was 3.1 per cent, as well as a further 1 per cent beyond this.

This increase is needed to help cover higher costs caused by inflation to maintain council homes and estates, provide kitchen, bathroom and electrical upgrades and build more council homes.

Money is also used to invest in improvements such as our digital transformation programme to enhance the way you can access the housing service and our work to bring back the repairs and maintenance service.

The council has pledged investment worth £38.9m next year to upgrade existing properties and build new homes. This forms part of a total investment of £171.6m in council-owned housing over the next five years.

This includes:

- £18.5m for a range of improvements including 289 new kitchens and 510 new bathrooms
- £8.7m to improve communal areas
- 790 new heating systems, five communal boiler upgrades, and 110 solar panel installations
- £2.1m to improve security for 625 homes by including 99 door entry system upgrades
- £1.4m towards adapting homes for disabled tenants.

Concerned about money?

Many residents are feeling the effects of ongoing cuts and rising living costs.

The city council is committed to supporting those hit hardest by the cost-of-living crisis – this is why next year's budget includes proposals to retain the council tax support scheme which provides relief of up to 100 per cent of council tax bills for those who are struggling.

Free money and budgeting advice is available to all council tenants. Speak to a housing officer or visit www.norwich.gov.uk/MoneyAdvice to find out more.

A year like no other

Our annual report is produced to give residents an overview of how the housing service is performing each year. The 2020 – 2021 report includes data from the first 12 months of the pandemic, a period that brought unprecedented challenges, required new ways of working and reminded us all of the importance of our communities supporting each other.

Affordable homes

Living in a council property is considerably more affordable than renting privately. Simple comparisons based on property sizes in the city are detailed below.

Size of property	Norwich City Council home: average weekly rent	Norwich private sector home: average weekly rent
1 bed	£68	£142
2 bed	£73	£170
3 bed	£82	£190
4 bed	£84	£337*

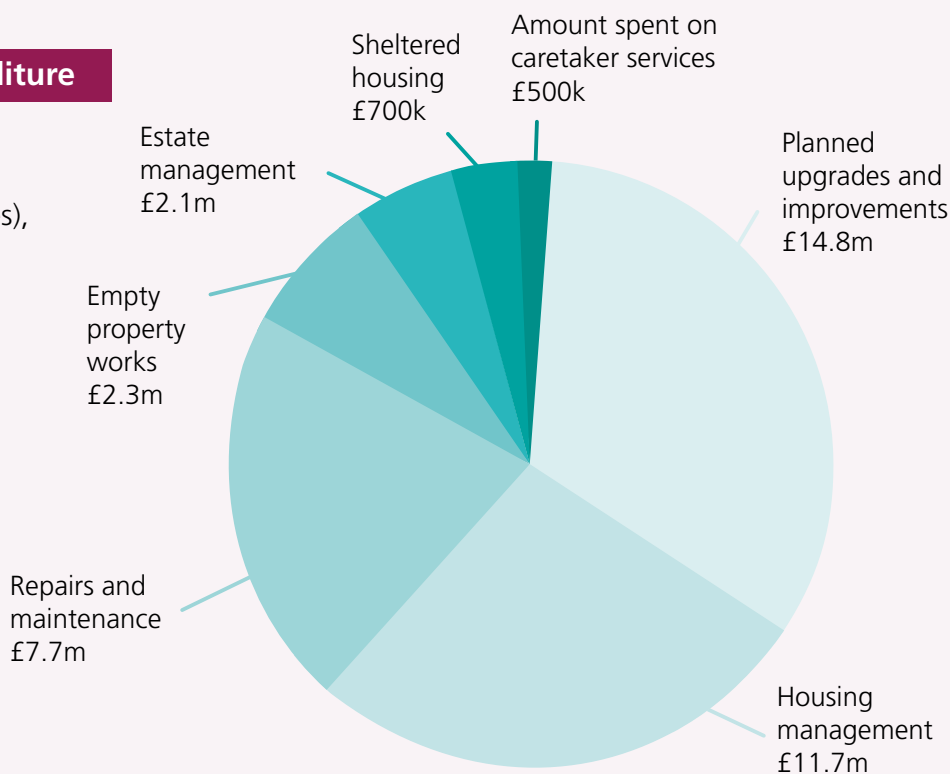
Source: Office for National Statistics

*average figure for properties with 4 bed-rooms or more

Income and expenditure

The income for providing housing services comes from rent (houses/garages), service charges and rechargeable repairs.

How this money is spent is broken down in this pie chart.



Repairs and maintenance

Number of repairs completed (non-urgent and emergency):

29,844

This is a slight reduction compared to the previous year due to the impact of the pandemic.

99% of homes have achieved the Norwich Standard (no kitchen more than 20 years old, no bathroom more than 30 years old and no boiler more than 15 years old).

258

new kitchens installed

459

new bathrooms installed

381

new heating systems installed

1,356

electrical upgrades completed

501

properties had external doors replaced

306

properties had new windows fitted

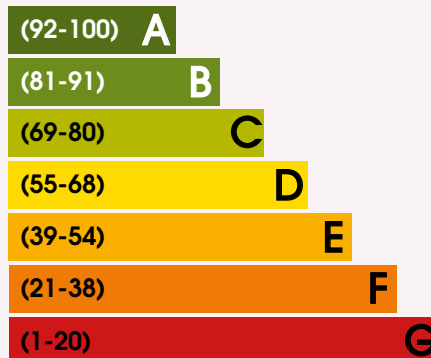
6

properties had a new roof fitted and 19 properties received roofline work

Energy efficient homes

We have continued our programme of boiler, window, door replacements and insulation improvements, targeting the lowest performing stock in terms of energy efficiency.

80% of our homes have a SAP score of A-C.



Breaking the cycle of homelessness

80% of households who approached us about facing homelessness were prevented from becoming homeless, which helped people in crisis

and saved money on temporary accommodation.

As part of the public health response to the pandemic,

we accommodated over 150 clients sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping. The majority of these successfully moved into hostel accommodation.

Allocation of council homes

A consultation was carried out on our Home Options policy, which determines how we allocate social housing in

Norwich. The updated policy will ensure that those in the greatest need receive priority for social housing in the city.

Rent collection

95% of all rent due (including arrears) was collected.

You can view the full report at www.norwich.gov.uk/housing

Building safety round up

Safety checks in homes



As a housing provider, the council has a range of responsibilities which helps to keep tenants' and leaseholders' homes safe – this includes completing regular safety checks.

Following an internal review of compliance work in 2021, the council identified some cases where these checks, and some follow-up work, had not taken place as they should have. This work relates to electrical, fire and water safety in council homes.

During our review, we reported ourselves to the Regulator of Social Housing. The regulator subsequently published a notice outlining why we hadn't met their requirements in some areas of the 'Home Standard'.

We wrote to all residents about this last year and detailed how we'd be putting things right.

Latest progress

- A health and safety compliance board has been set up to closely monitor the progress of the improvement plan.

- Progress has been made in addressing the immediate actions in the compliance improvement plan. The projects and actions in the plan are being prioritised in order of importance.
- Regular updates will be presented at the council's cabinet meetings which are held in public.
- We are working to the same timescale set in November 2021 – aiming to seek full compliance within 12 months and establish an improved approach to our repairs and maintenance service by November 2023.

Thank you to everyone who has made this progress possible by allowing our contractors into your home to complete these essential checks.

More information, including the most recent data and cabinet report can be found at www.norwich.gov.uk/HousingCompliance

Guidance on solid fuel burners

As your landlord, our responsibilities also extend to the use of solid fuel appliances in our properties – such as wood burners.

Recent changes in the law in the UK have been made to ensure the wood you buy and use in burners and fireplaces contain less than 20 per cent water content as damp wood burns slower and increases the amount of smoke and pollutants released.

This dried wood will be clearly labelled by suppliers with a 'ready to burn' sticker and certification number to identify it.

The 'ready to burn' certification also applies to coal which will have a low sulphur content and therefore emit lower emissions. It will become illegal to burn traditional house coal in homes after 1 May 2023.

If you're lighting your burner, please take all the necessary steps to reduce the pollutants you're exposed to in your own home as well as the effect you're having on neighbours and the wider environment.

For more information visit www.ReadyToBurn.org

Solid fuel burners in council homes

- We no longer grant permission for wood burners or other solid fuel appliances for safety and environmental reasons.
- If a property containing a solid fuel appliance becomes empty the appliance will be removed and the chimney opening sealed before a new tenant moves in.
- If an existing appliance or chimney is found to be dangerous it will be removed.



Manage your housing online

From April you can manage your council tenancy and housing application through our new and improved portal 'Housing Online'.

- **Bid for a property** – if your housing needs have changed, you can manage your application.
- **View rent owed** – make payments and payment arrangements.
- **Diagnose and request a repair** – with access to the booking calendar.
- **Track a repair** – keep an eye on progress.

How to sign up

1. Visit **www.norwich.gov.uk/MyAccount**. Create or log in to 'My Account'.
2. Set up a **separate** 'Housing Online' account. You'll need your **person reference number** to do this, which can be found on your **next** rent notification.
3. Confirm your identity when you receive a verification email.
4. Once you have registered for 'Housing Online' you'll only need to log into 'My Account' to access tenancy services.

Top tip

Don't save the 'Housing Online' landing page as a favourite – it's important you log in through 'My Account'.

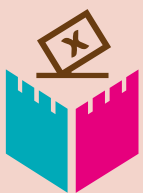
If you need help signing up to online services we can help. Please get in touch by calling **0344 980 3333**.



Get ready for the local elections in May

Don't miss out on having your voice heard at the local election on Thursday 5 May.

Norwich City Council holds elections by thirds, which means one of every three seats in each of the 13 city wards will be up for grabs.



NORWICH
elections

Why vote in local elections

Our local council has an impact on many of the services you see and use every day, including housing issues, waste and recycling and public spaces.

Choices made at City Hall will have visible impacts on your community so make sure you've been part of choosing who makes these decisions.

You can vote for candidates who have a similar vision

for the future of your community as you do.

Councillors represent a much smaller group of people than MPs, that means your single vote is more likely to make an impact on the result.

Register to vote

You can do this easily and quickly online at **www.gov.uk/register-to-vote** – you'll need your date of birth and National Insurance number to complete your application.

Sharing tenant voices

Update from the January Tenant Involvement Panel meeting (TIP)

Our TIP meets regularly to discuss topical tenancy matters.

Here are the highlights from January's meeting:

- Tenants reflected on what it means to be a council tenant, following a talk from the Association of Retained Social Housing (ARCH).

Members felt that social housing can be seen as a last resort, and that the media contribute to a negative reputation.

However, it was also noted that a council house is more than a roof over a head. It is also a home where people can put down roots and become part of a community.

What does being a council tenant mean to you? Join the conversation by emailing involvement@norwich.gov.uk

- Members were introduced to new (interim) head of housing, Bob Granville.
- Council officers attended to discuss fire safety in tower blocks and work we are doing to improve the way estates look and feel.

More ways to get involved

Perhaps you'd rather give quick feedback every so often?

Our Talkback Panel is an easy and informal way you can have your say on the housing services we provide. Each survey is very quick and can be completed by text, online or by post. We limit the number of surveys sent to individuals and it is easy to opt-out at any time. This feedback is used to help develop and improve services.

You can join the Talkback Panel by:

- completing the 'sign up' form at www.norwich.gov.uk/TenantInvolvement
- emailing involvement@norwich.gov.uk

We will get back to you with further information, answer any questions you have and complete your sign up to the panel.

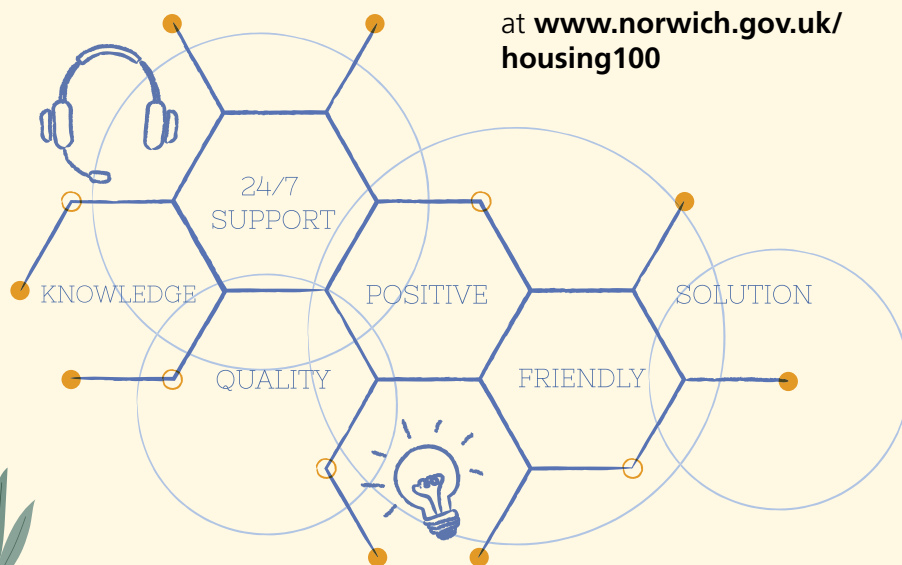
Celebrating our centenary trees



Back in 2018 we planted 100 trees around the city to celebrate 100 years of council housing in Norwich. Trees improve air quality, help mitigate climate change, support wildlife and enhance our mental health: what's not to like?

We'd love to see how these saplings are growing, so please share your photos of a tree near you.

The trees' locations are listed at www.norwich.gov.uk/housing100



Love where you live

Do you love where you live? We've been listening to resident feedback to improve the look and feel of our neighbourhoods. Here are some of the latest projects completed around the city.

A Magdalen makeover

The Magdalen Street car park has been cleared and resurfaced, with new signage and defined parking spaces, making it smarter and more user friendly.



A glow up for the Charlton Road sheds

Damaged sheds have been replaced with new brick ones which should have a longer life span and are easier on the eye.



New lease of life for benches at Alfred Nicholls Court

Anyone who has watched the TV hit 'After Life', starring Ricky Gervais, will know the importance a bench can have to a community.

We've refurbished and replaced benches at Alfred Nicholls Court to create a new seating area for residents to meet and reflect.



How we will get in touch with you

As your housing provider, there will be times we contact you in response to an issue you have raised, because we need to arrange a visit or discuss something relating to your tenancy.

Council officers will only contact you via the following methods:

- **Letter** – look for our official letter headed paper
- **Telephone** – we will introduce ourselves in full
- **Email** from a @norwich.gov.uk address

- **Text or WhatsApp** message from a number beginning 07860 or your named housing officer/housing income officer.

The council will not contact you about housing matters via any social media channels – this includes Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Twitter and Instagram.

Anyone visiting your property from the council or one of our contractors will always be able to show identification. Don't hesitate to ask to see this if it's not on display.

If you have concerns about anyone contacting you outside of the official ways listed above, please get in touch with us straightaway.



Contacting Norwich City Council

ONLINE You can report repairs, access council services and make online payments.

www.norwich.gov.uk

Register for 'My Account' to check your rent and council tax balance. Take a look at 'My Norwich' to see what services are available in your area.

POST Norwich City Council,
City Hall, Norwich NR2 1NH.

Out of hours emergencies:
01603 412180.

Free phone payment hotline:
0800 021 7784 (a 24/7 service).

Money advisers:
0344 980 3333 or email
BudgetingAndMoneyAdvice@norwich.gov.uk

Text relay users only:
18001 01603 212587
(9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday).

Leaseholders:
For help and advice on your rights and responsibilities, contact the home ownership team on 0344 980 3333 or at HomeOwnership@norwich.gov.uk

Report repairs online

To report non-urgent repairs (and for a chance to win £50) go to:

- www.norwich.gov.uk/repairs
- Click 'report a non-urgent repair'
- Enter your details and let the repairs software guide you through the rest...

**Available 24/7 and works on
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Quick and easy to do



Request your preferred time



No waiting in phone queues



Save the cost of a call

**A chance
to win
£50!!**

**T&Cs apply*

Loss of gas or electricity?

If you have lost your gas or electricity supply you should contact your energy supplier directly in the first instance.

Need space for your car?



Are you confident that you can secure a parking space every time you drive to work? Would you like secure off-street parking at home? Why not rent a garage or parking bay from Norwich City Council? Garages are located throughout the city and available to rent whether you live within the city boundary or not.

For more information, go to www.norwich.gov.uk/garages