

tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'
community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Spring 2023

Tenant
approved



Rent charges update
Page 4



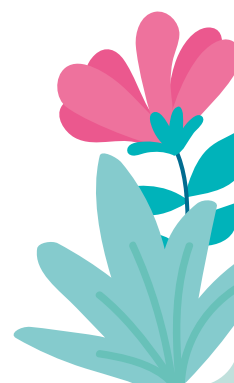
**What next for tenant
engagement?** Page 5



Great estates
Pages 8-9

Contents

	page
Introduction	3
Changes to rent charges	4
A new chapter for tenant engagement	5
New homes in Mile Cross	6
Property services update	7
Great estates	8-9
Annual report highlights	10
How are we doing?	11



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.



Follow us



@NorwichCC



Norwich City Council



Norwich City Council

Welcome to the spring issue of TLC magazine

Introduction from Bob Granville

(Interim) executive director of housing and community safety

As we all settle into 2023, this edition covers some important topics, including details of rent changes, a property services update, and a comprehensive performance round up.

The city council is always striving to provide new affordable housing and at the end of last year the first residents moved into five eco-friendly family homes built on the site of the former Kings Arms pub in Mile Cross. It is a great example of taking a derelict site and transforming it into much needed homes for people in Norwich. You can read more about the project on page four.

As well as providing decent and affordable homes, we know that residents care just as much about the areas surrounding the place they live. We are carrying out a range of improvements including work on new play areas, park benches and refurbishing entrances as well as supporting different community projects. Residents are able to make their own suggestions on what improvements they would like to see in their area, and I strongly encourage you to share any ideas. On pages eight and nine you can find more information on how to do this.

The safety of our residents is of the utmost importance to the council. In this issue you will find an update on our approach to tackling damp and mould, as well as an update on fire safety in our tower blocks.

Lastly, we know many residents are feeling the effects of rising living costs. Our money and budgeting advice team is available for anyone that needs help, offering a free service that is available to all council tenants. You'll find the contact details on page four where we also explain changes to next year's rent payments.



Changes to your rent payments

You should have received your annual rent notice at the beginning of March, explaining what the weekly rent for your tenancy will be from April 2023 to March 2024.

Council rents are agreed each year, following rules set by central government and taking into account factors such as average manual wages, council property values and the number of bedrooms in your home.

This year's seven per cent increase represents an average rise of £5.85 per week.

The increase will help cover rises in inflation and make sure the council can continue to: maintain council homes and estates; provide kitchen, bathroom and electrical upgrades; and build more council homes.

We will contact you directly about your rent and anything you need to do regarding your payments. If you pay by Direct Debit, you don't need to do anything, your payments will update automatically.

If you receive Universal Credit, you will need to update your journal with the increase in rent or you won't receive all the benefit you're entitled to.

Dealing with rising costs

Many residents are feeling the effects of rising living costs. Don't forget, you can speak to an income officer at any time if you have concerns or questions about your rent. Email them at: **HousingIncome@norwich.gov.uk**

The city council is committed to supporting those hit hardest by the cost-of-living crisis – 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. Visit **www.norwich.gov.uk/MoneyAdvice** for more information.

	Rent 2022/23	Increase (7%)	Proposed rent 2023/24
Average	£83.63	£5.85	£89.49
Maximum	£129.99	£9.10	£139.09
Minimum	£59.58	£4.17	£63.75



A new chapter for tenant engagement

At the end of last year we asked tenants to share their views on how our housing team engages with them. Thank you to all of the 1,600 people who shared their views.

We used all the information provided to help shape our new tenant engagement strategy, which we consulted on this February. You are the experts on living in council homes and we want to work with you to make sure housing services are continually improving and offering warm, safe, and secure homes.

Here is a summary of what you told us:

What is most important to you in the housing service?

- Repairs and maintenance (93%)
- Building safety (90%)
- Anti-social behaviour (87%)

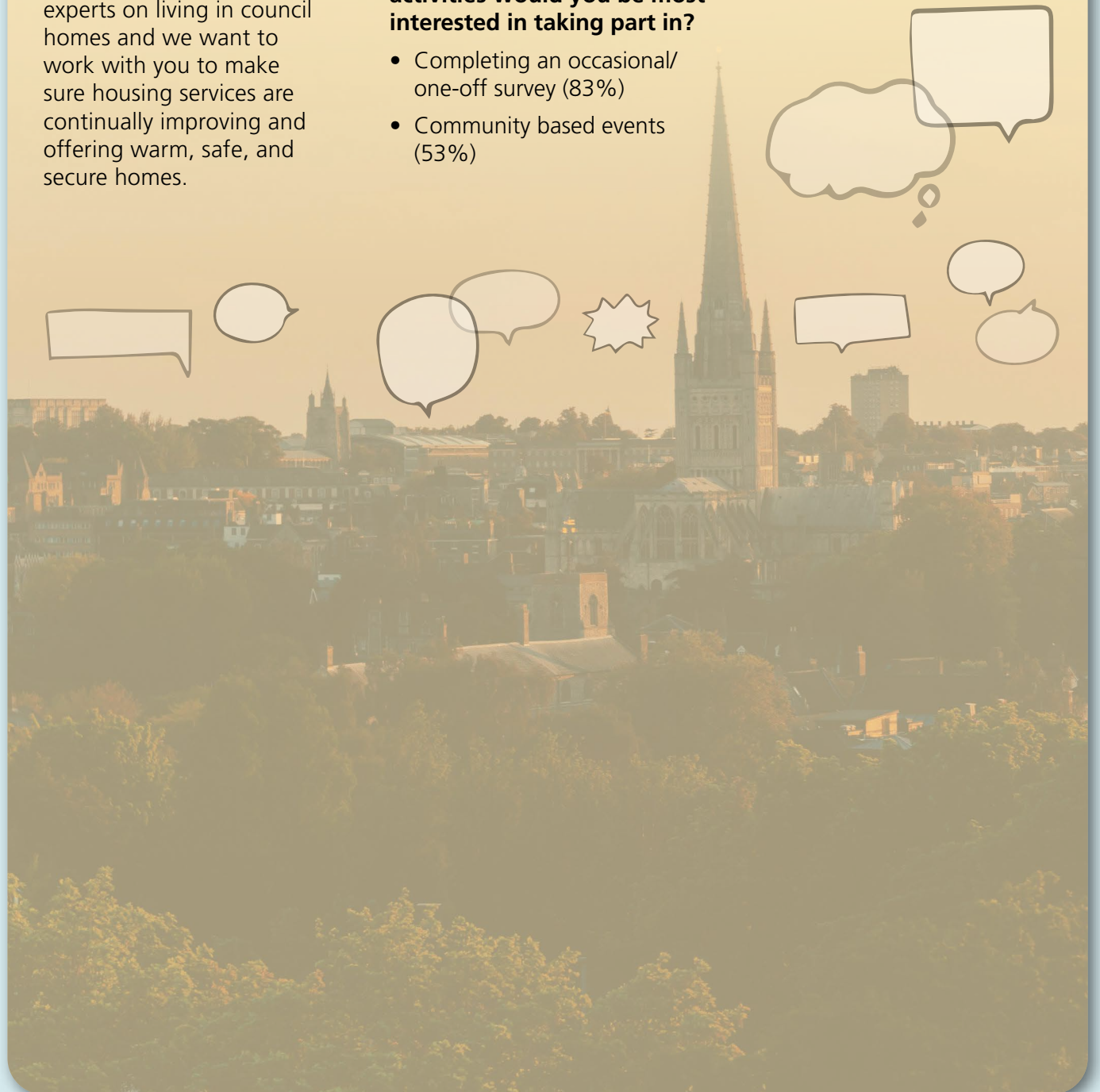
What type of engagement activities would you be most interested in taking part in?

- Completing an occasional/ one-off survey (83%)
- Community based events (53%)

What is the most used social media channel for our tenants?

- Facebook (69%)

91% of respondents told us the information provided in tlc is useful or very useful, and 66% read most or every issue.



New council homes transform derelict site in Mile Cross

The site of the former Kings Arms public house in Mile Cross has been given a new lease of life after the city council built five eco-friendly new homes in its place.

The council bought the site to provide social housing in 2020 and built a two-bedroom bungalow, a five-bedroom house and three four-bedroom houses. New residents moved into the properties at the end of last year.

The homes are designed to save tenants money on heating and hot water. They have extra insulation and low carbon features, including air source heat pumps, triple glazing and solar panels.

A city council spokesperson, commenting on the new homes, said: "Turning this deserted plot into much-needed homes is a fantastic outcome for the city and demonstrates our ongoing commitment to social housing.

"Purchasing the King Arms site to benefit the community is an example of how we are being creative to address the demand for affordable housing while staying true to our environmental ambitions."

Sam, a new resident who has moved from within Mile Cross, said: "We are really pleased to have moved in and have already met lots of neighbours.

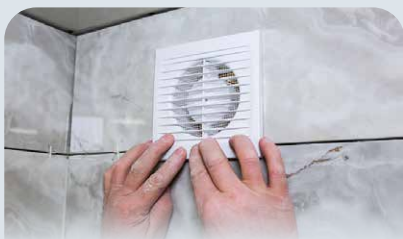
"This new home gives our family more space and staying in the area has meant we haven't had to change anything else."



Tackling damp and mould in council homes

We know that damp issues can affect your quality of life, especially if you have health conditions or young children.

Like housing providers around the country, we have been reviewing our approach to damp and mould in council homes in response to a report by The Housing Ombudsman. We are already making several significant improvements to our procedures.



This includes better training for staff when visiting properties following reports of problems and doing a 'mould-wash' in all properties, as standard, when they are first reported.

If you notice damp or mould in your property, please report it immediately. While we are addressing any issues, there are things that can help reduce damp:



- Make use of extractor fans in your kitchen and bathroom. Let us know if these aren't working or you don't have them.
- Keep any vents open to allow air into your property.
- Be mindful about drying clothes indoors. We know this is unavoidable in the winter months but where possible do this in your most ventilated room.



Fire safety update

We have been reviewing our fire risk assessments (FRAs) as part of our work to address issues we identified with some of our health and safety checks in 2021. FRAs help us understand what the risks are if there were to be a fire in any of our blocks of flats.

This review included testing some of the front doors fitted in tower blocks by one of our contractors up to 2020. The results showed the doors may not stop the spread of fire and smoke for as long as they should. All front doors in tower blocks will be replaced free of charge, for all tenants and leaseholders. We are also fitting new heat alarms in all tower block flats to provide additional

early warning to all residents in the event of a fire.

We have, and will continue, to work closely with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to ensure our emergency plans are up to date. Our fire service

colleagues are supportive of the action we are taking.

For more information, or to raise any fire safety concerns, please email **HousingCompliance@norwich.gov.uk**



Great estates

Loving where you live is as much about the areas surrounding your home, as your home itself. We are committed to finding ways to invest in and improve our neighbourhoods.

A new place to play

Families living in a busy city neighbourhood can now enjoy a new and improved play area that will allow children of all abilities to play together, thanks to investment from the council's estate improvement budget.

Douro Place, close to Pottergate, is home to more than 100 households and the basic play area had become tired and untidy. It was put forward for improvement by local residents.

The upgrade has a focus on catering for people of all abilities. Much of the equipment is designed with inclusivity in mind, including additional accessible seating for those supervising children playing.

New equipment includes swings, sensory boards and a castle themed climbing frame, so children can imagine running around Norwich Castle itself.



Local mum of two, Caroline Warvill, said: "It's lovely to have a new play area so close to home that both my children can enjoy, especially during half term."

A city council spokesperson said: "The improvements to this play area are a wonderful and meaningful example of our ongoing commitment to enhancing our estates in a variety of ways.

"Play areas like the one at Douro Place sit at the heart of the community and have benefits for all ages. We've also paid particular attention to making sure that this is an accessible play area.

"We urge residents to continue working with our housing teams to identify further opportunities to improve the areas surrounding their homes."



Payback team's boost for council gardens

A community payback team has recently been helping in gardens at Magdalen Close. Our tenancy management team approached residents to ask if they needed assistance with overgrown gardens.

Twelve households signed up, and community payback members have completed the following tasks:

- Removal of overgrowth, weeds, and green waste from 12 front gardens
- Trimming back trees in gardens to bring them to a manageable height
- Tidying of communal green spaces, removing waste, cutting back overgrowth, and clearance of hard standing areas.

Community payback is a scheme managed by the Probation Service which allows low-risk offenders to make amends for their crimes through unpaid work. They have partnered with the city council to help make improvements in our housing estates. We have received positive feedback from both members of the community payback scheme, who have gained new skills, and residents who have been pleased with the results.

IMPROVEMENTS



What improvements would you like to see?

How could the area around your home be improved? This could be anything from new signage and noticeboards, items to help with a community project or enhancing a tired part of a building. Here are some examples.



As part of a community project, Longmead residents asked us to supply and install some new fixed recycled plastic planters to the communal green spaces across the development.



Refurbished entrances at Heathgate and Mousehold Street



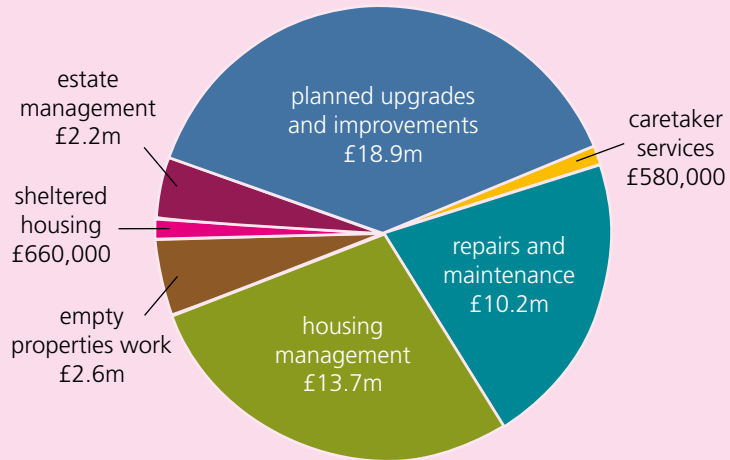
New benches at Millers Lane (above) and Fugil Road made from recycled plastic.

To suggest an estate improvement in your area please let us know at www.norwich.gov.uk/EstateImprovements

Annual report overview

Our latest annual report covers the housing service's performance from April 2021 to April 2022 – when we were still dealing with the effects of the pandemic while also preparing to bring our housing repairs and maintenance service under more direct council control. Here are some of the headlines from the report. You can read the full report on our website.

Expenditure in financial year 2021/2022



Expenditure in 2021/22 financial year

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) records expenditure and income on running the council's housing stock and closely related services or facilities. Income for providing housing services comes from rent (houses/garages), service charges and rechargeable repairs. The majority of the money is spent on planned upgrades and improvements to council homes, managing our housing stock and repairs and maintenance.

Repairs and upgrades

- 29,339 repairs completed (non-urgent and emergency)
- 800 new kitchens and bathrooms installed
- 1426 electrical upgrades completed
- 468 new heating systems installed

Tenant involvement

- Nine Tenant Involvement Panel meetings held
- Consulted regarding single supplier to streamline services

- Consulted about the council bringing back services under more direct control, including housing, property and environmental services
- Consulted on rent increase
- Resident involvement session at Eastern Procurement

Tenant training

We held an engagement workshop to gain feedback from the tenant involvement panel on how they would like to see tenant engagement in the future.

Affordable homes

Living in a council property is considerably cheaper than renting privately, as shown in the table on the left.

Affordable homes

Size of property	council home: average weekly rent	private sector home: average weekly rent
1 bed	£69	£158
2 bed	£75	£201
3 bed	£83	£242
4 bed	£89	£357*

Source: Office for National Statistics

*average figure for properties with 4 bedrooms or more.

How are we doing?

We monitor the performance of the housing service by asking residents to take part in our STAR satisfaction survey and measuring key performance indicators. Here are the latest quarterly results as at December 2022:

- Above or on target
- Close to target
- Below target

77%

of tenants are satisfied with the service we provide

87%

of households who asked for help were prevented from becoming homeless

66

days is the average time it took to relet empty properties

72%

of tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home

82%

of tenants feel their home is safe and secure

57%

of tenants find the housing service is easy to deal with

93.93%

of rent was collected (including arrears brought forward)

8%

of reviewed homeless decisions were overturned



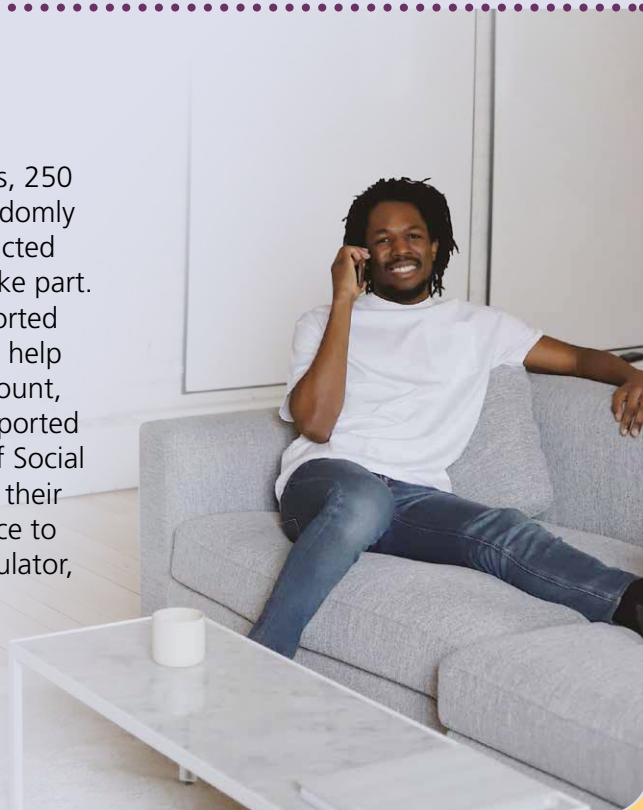
Visit www.norwich.gov.uk/HousingPerformance for more information.

A new way to have your say

We will be inviting you to take part in a new satisfaction survey required to be carried out by all housing providers from April, as part of the changes to social housing regulations.

The new survey, carried out by Viewpoint, will replace and expand the current STAR survey. Topics will include: overall satisfaction, repairs service, landlord's approach to communal areas and the ways you are kept informed.

Every three months, 250 tenants will be randomly selected and contacted by telephone to take part. Results will be reported to tenants and will help you hold us to account, as well as being reported to the Regulator of Social Housing as part of their role. It's your chance to let us, and the regulator, know your views on the housing service.



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:
BudgetingAndMoneyAdvice@
norwich.gov.uk

Text relay users only:
18001 01344 980 3333
(9am to 4pm, Monday
to Friday).

Leaseholders:
For help and advice on your
rights and responsibilities,
email the home ownership
team on HomeOwnership@
norwich.gov.uk

Housing Ombudsman:
info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
0300 1113000
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Report repairs online

A chance
to win
£50!!

*T&Cs apply

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

- **Log in to 'My Account'**
- Sign up for '**Housing Online**' to report and book your repair, where you can also manage other elements of your tenancy, including your rent account.

You will need to set up two separate log-ins for both **My Account** and **Housing Online** if you've not logged in before. After you have signed up, you'll only need to sign into My Account to access Housing Online features.

When signing up for the first time, you will need your unique rent reference number, which can be found on your recent rent notification.

**Available 24/7 and works on
PCs, tablets and smartphones**



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