

# Homeowners News





# Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Homeowners News. This twice yearly publication is aimed at providing you with up-to-date information on matters that affect you as one of our Homeowners.

In this edition we will tell you about a number of important changes to our services, which include changing our service charge accounting period and the introduction of new policies.

You will also find a summary of the key information contained within this year's annual report, together with updates on progress being made on service improvements, such as the reform of our sinking funds.

We are pleased to welcome our new Homeowners at Ducrow Court, Bristol; Horatio House, Portishead; Summerlays Court, Bath; Westford Grange, Wellington and Tanners Close, Norton Radstock.

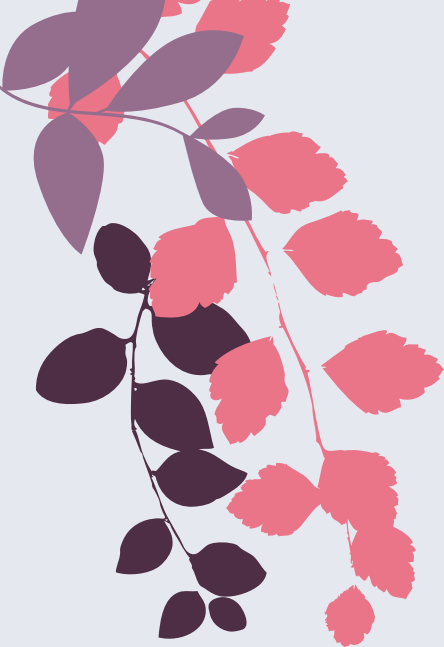
At your request and to save costs, the last three editions of Homeowners News have not been sent to you in the post, but they're available on the Nectar Homes website. This time however, we have sent it to you because we want to make sure that everyone becomes aware of the recently published annual report.

We also thought it was time to test the decision not to send the newsletter to you.

Our Spring 2011 edition of Homeowners News will therefore be published to the website only, unless you contact us to tell us you'd like to receive a copy.

We hope you find this edition useful and informative. If you have any comments on the content, style or frequency of publication, please let us know.





## Homeowners Conference

In July, we held our first Homeowners Conference which was well attended and stimulated a lot of useful and lively debate.

The event was held on a warm summer afternoon in Bristol. We presented a wide range of subjects, pre-selected by our Homeowners, such as maintenance services, value for money, sinking funds, dealing with anti social behaviour, planned maintenance and the setting of service charges. We had question and answer sessions and held a surgery at the end of the event to deal with individual issues.

*"The conference was very informative and I enjoyed meeting the Nectar Homes representatives and other residents."* **Mr B of Portishead**

*"I found the conference really informative and enjoyable."* **Mrs B who flew from Spain to attend the event**

*"I own a large number of properties and no other landlord or management company has ever done this kind of thing before. I find you approachable and easy to get information from and I really enjoyed the day."* **Mr M of Bristol**

As well as providing you with information about how we provide our services, we got a lot of useful feedback for our consideration. As a result of your comments, we are currently producing a booklet to explain in detail the service charge statements we send you and we are also exploring financial incentives which we can offer for early payment of bills and charges.

We are likely to hold similar events in the future, so please watch out for further details.



# Service Charges - moving to an April review date

Last year, you told us that the service charge process is too complicated, difficult to understand and that we send you too much paperwork which adds to the confusion. We have acted on this feedback and propose to make two significant changes;

From April 2011, we have a 3 stage process to review your annual service charge, as follows;

**Stage 1 (June), we will send you;**

- An income and expenditure statement for communal services relating to your block and / or estate and confirm any surplus credit amount or deficit balance owing
- Details of any day to day repair jobs undertaken in communal areas for your block and / or estate and confirm your contribution towards these costs
- Provide you with a timescale (30 days) to raise any queries about your communal services costs. Should a query be received after the consultation period has expired and an adjustment be required, this will be dealt with in the next accounting period.

**Stage 2 (November), we will consult with you about your estimated service charge payable from the following April. We will confirm;**

- Any surplus credit amount, or deficit balance owing from your income and expenditure statement (as mentioned above)
- Your day to day communal repair(s) contribution (as mentioned above)
- Your service charge budget
- Your administration charge
- Our management fee
- Building insurance (if applicable)
- Contribution towards a building sinking fund for your home (if applicable)
- We will provide you with a timescale (30 days) to raise any queries about your estimated service charge.

Should a query be received after the consultation period has expired and an adjustment be required, this will be carried forward to the next accounting period.

**Stage 3 (February), we will confirm your annual service charge payable from April. We will also send you a copy of your "Rights and Obligations". We have a legal obligation to send you this paperwork and also have to use the prescribed legislative wording and format for the paperwork.**

We are producing a booklet to help explain your service charge in much more detail. This booklet will be sent to you as part of our consultation process for your charges being set from April 2011.

We believe these changes will improve our service to you and make it easier for you to understand how we calculate your service charge.





## Sinking Funds

Many of you who contribute into a sinking fund for long term repairs, will be aware that we have been working for some time to reform the way we manage these funds. A project team has been set up within the Association, made up of representatives from our Finance, Asset Management, Rent Services, IT and Homeownership Management Teams. The reform of these funds means re-thinking the way we calculate contributions into the fund, the way we charge for completed works, and the way we account financially to you. We have already held a great many meetings, to look at a wide range of issues and how best to implement any changes. No changes will take place, without undertaking an involved consultation process with all affected Homeowners but before this, we must ensure that operating procedures, reporting procedures and information technology can deliver the changes we want.

I am pleased to tell you that we are close to being able to discuss our proposals with you. We are now looking to set up a small working group of Homeowners to work closely with us and steer us towards proposals which we can present to all Homeowners.

We hope to form this working group immediately. If you would like to take part in this process, we would be very grateful to hear from you.



# Annual Report

Our regulator the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) has asked all social housing providers to produce an annual report for Homeowners, telling you how we meet the new set of housing service standards, which the TSA established this year, and how we have performed against them. The report has been published on the Nectar Homes website and can be found in the information section.

The report pulls together key information on what we have been doing over the past 12 months to improve services for you. This includes:

## Our performance against service standards

How we have improved communications with you (including our website, publications, conferences and the strengthening of the Homeowners Panel)

The development of our policies

Our repairs and maintenance services

How we deal with anti social behaviour

How we have been working to improve value for money in the services we provide to you.

We would be delighted if you could find time to read through the report and let us know your comments or observations. If you don't have access to the internet and would like a paper copy, please let us know.



# Compliments and complaints

We record all compliments and complaints, not only to ensure that issues that arise are dealt with efficiently, but also so we can learn from what you tell us.

We are pleased to report that compliments have increased this year and that complaints have decreased. Nevertheless, we will not become complacent and will continue to strive towards zero complaints if at all possible.

Whilst many complaints are specific to an individual, there are occasions when complaints are about the same subject. This year we have received a number of complaints about the gardening maintenance services, following the introduction of new

contractors. We have listened carefully to what has been said and are working closely with the contractors to improve performance. We believe that these improvements are already beginning to show, although we still welcome your comments and observations about this and any other aspect of our maintenance services.

We have also received a number of complaints about the presentation of our service charge information and how difficult you find it to understand all the information being sent. In response to this we have set up a small working group to look at streamlining the amount of information sent to you and produce a booklet which explains all the information on the statements. We hope to publish this soon and include it within your next service charge statement.





## Arrears and Forfeiture Policy

From July this year, our Arrears and Forfeiture Policy has come into force. The policy has been put in place to ensure a clear understanding of our approach to the prevention of arrears and our approach to debt recovery.

Arrears of rent, service charge, sinking fund, ground rent, re-charges and other properly incurred costs, have a significant negative impact on our business, which leads to an increase in management time, dealing with income recovery and the consequential increase in management fees to all of our customers.

The policy seeks to prevent arrears by offering advice and assistance as well as where necessary to recover outstanding debts by taking timely and positive action.

The policy is available on our website in the information section. If you would like us to send you a paper copy, please let us know.

## Telling us what you think

We live in a world where everyone who provides you with a service wants you to tell them about your experience and how they can improve those services..... and we are no different!

However, we are also acutely aware that sending you endless forms to fill in can be very tedious and from our point of view, often doesn't get a good response. This creates a dilemma as we need you to tell us what you think, but we don't want to annoy you by constantly asking for feedback.

We have approached an independent specialist market research organisation Voluntas. They recommend that in addition to the large survey that we are required to carry out by our regulators (the Homes and Communities Agency) every three years, that we undertake a sample survey by telephone to a small number of randomly selected people who represent all customer groups. These telephone surveys should take no more than a few minutes to complete. There will be approximately 10 questions, which we will use to determine how well we are doing and what we are doing less well.

We will publish the results of these surveys to our website, so that you can see exactly what everyone is saying about us. If you are one of the households taking part in these surveys, we very much hope you will be able to spare us a few minutes of your time and we look forward to receiving your contributions.





# Contact details



### Homebuy Sales Team

Tel: 08458 504505

Email: [mail@nectarhomes.co.uk](mailto:mail@nectarhomes.co.uk)

If you have an idea for a story in the newsletter, please let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

### Homeownership Management Team

Tel: 0117 984 8170 (Bristol)

Tel: 01934 524462 (Weston-super-Mare)

Tel: 01202 505558 (Poole)

Email: [homeowner@nectarhomes.co.uk](mailto:homeowner@nectarhomes.co.uk)

[www.nectarhomes.co.uk](http://www.nectarhomes.co.uk)

