

# Home life

Winter 2008

The magazine for  
customers of  
South Anglia  
Housing

**What a year! Round up 2008**  
pages 4 & 5

**Our first Residents Conference**  
in pictures  
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**South Anglia celebrates our**  
community heroes  
pages 8 & 9



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**South Anglia**  
Housing

Part of Circle Anglia



## Welcome

Your involvement in helping us improve services and the contributions that you make to the communities you live in can make a real difference. This was really apparent to all of us during the Community Spirit Awards at the end of October. These awards have been running for a number of years and give us the opportunity to recognise some of the effort and energy that people put into their local areas.

I would like to personally thank all of you who make an effort for your neighbours and communities and assist us in making people's houses a home.

As the days get shorter we all use more heating and lighting. At South Anglia Housing we are working to assist you with making this more affordable at a time of rising prices. By now you should have all received some energy saving light bulbs from one of our partner contractors. This is just one of the ways in which we are trying to make a difference.

From all of us at South Anglia we hope you have a fantastic festive season and an enjoyable New Year.

Best wishes,

Chris Ellison  
Managing Director, South Anglia Housing

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## South Anglia Residents' Forum - a year of progress



This has been an eventful year for the South Anglia Residents' Forum, or SARF. A Doorstep Challenge programme was initiated in February. SARF members were invited to attend these challenges, both to raise the profile of the group, and to assist South Anglia Housing in encouraging residents to meet with staff from different departments in order to discuss their personal concerns. The current programme of Doorstep Challenges is planned to continue at monthly intervals until March.

South Anglia Housing's first annual tenants' conference was held on 29th October at the Rhodes Centre in Bishops Stortford. This event was organised jointly with SARF. Residents were afforded the opportunity to discuss a wide range of personal issues with staff from every department. The tenants' conference was followed in the evening by the annual Community Spirit Awards, which recognise the many residents who have made a particular contribution to their communities.

2008 has been a year of increasing opportunities for resident involvement. This has resulted in many improvements in South Anglia Housing's delivery of service to their residents.

SARF is committed to continued support of South Anglia Housing in its active pursuit of continuous improvement in the years to come. Any residents who feel that they would like to participate in our Residents' Forum activities will be made most welcome.

Norman Pascoe, member of SARF

# Christmas opening hours

Wednesday 24th December	8.30 – 3.00
<b>Thursday 25th December</b>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Friday 26th December</b>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Saturday 27th December</b>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Sunday 28th December</b>	<b>Closed</b>
Monday 29th December	8.30 – 5.00
Tuesday 30th December	8.30 – 5.00
Wednesday 31st December	8.30 – 4.00
<b>Thursday 1st January</b>	<b>Closed</b>
Friday 2nd January	8.30 – 5.00

Normal out of hours services apply after these times.



## Stay safe

Has your heating system been checked recently? When was the last time your chimney was swept? It doesn't matter whether you have gas or oil central heating or an open fire and flu, any appliance which burns a fossil fuel can give off poisonous carbon monoxide.

We are legally required to carry out annual checks on all heating appliances – including cookers. If you fail to let our staff carry out the required safety checks, you could be facing court costs. But a bigger threat is to your lives. If a fuel does not burn properly it can produce excess gas in the form of carbon monoxide. This is responsible for 30 deaths in the UK every year.

All heating appliances need annual servicing, rather like your car. This will ensure it operates safely and efficiently. Routine checks of flues, door seals, air controls and fire parts will help to ensure you get maximum value from the fuel burned. Similarly, your

central heating system may benefit from an annual check-over.

Carbon monoxide is undetectable, so the only way to make sure you're safe is to service your heating system regularly and thoroughly. If you think you have gone too long without a safety check then please call us and we will send somebody to your home.

Contact R G Francis on **01245 459800** or [e.enquires@rgfrancis.co.uk](mailto:e.enquires@rgfrancis.co.uk) or contact us on **0800 694 0159, 0845 600 1543** or **01279 714714**.

## In the know

Unless you've already requested a new Residents' Handbook, yours is probably out of date. When we updated this publication we asked residents whether they wanted one automatically sent, or only sent when they requested it. Based on your response we've been sending them out when asked to, but this does mean that many South Anglia residents are using out of date information.

If you'd like to receive a copy of our most up to date handbook, call **0800 694 0159**.



# What a year

As 2008 draws to a close, we look back over a packed year where we've grown our team, started new projects, and got you more involved in the development of our services than ever before. Here are some of the highlights.

## January

### Easing the pinch

We employed a new debt advisor to support the income team. The larger team helped many of you to reduce the post-Christmas debt that can make this time of year tough for many people financially. In the first six months of 2008 the income team helped 91 tenants with advice on their finances, reducing debt or getting benefits. We also offered every new tenant a home visit, so that you could meet your local income officer and feel confident that help was available if you had any problems.

## March

### Team work

Work began on converting an ageing South Anglia-owned women's hostel into a series of new, affordable homes. South Anglia development and supported housing colleagues formed a project team which included Watford Borough Council, and the partnership re-housed all existing residents within the required timescale.

## May

### Doorstep success

The first Doorstep Challenge kicked off in May on the Vange estate, bringing a team of South Anglia staff to your doors to see if they could help out on the spot. Challenges included performing small repairs and helping you to fill out forms. The launch saw tenants recording feedback on film, which has been used to brief staff so we can continue to improve. We know from your responses that the challenges have been a success, and we will continue them into 2009.



## February

### Quality in action

For the first time we brought together our Property Services Quality Action Group. By meeting on a regular basis and speaking to you about your needs, the group challenges the way we provide our services, and helps us keep them up to date.



## April

### Repairs overhaul

April saw the start of a great new partnership between current contractors Anglia Maintenance Services (AMS) and Mears Group Plc. This was in direct response to your comments about our repairs service. We have put IT systems in place to track and monitor the progress of repairs, and given the contractors strict targets, to deliver their promises on time and to a high standard.



## June

### Hello and goodbye

In June we said a fond farewell and a large thank you to Alan Hall, who stood down as Chair of the South Anglia Board. Alan gave us outstanding service during his time in the role. His departure meant that we also welcomed a new face in the form of his replacement, Murray Foster.

## July

### Increased support

We introduced two dedicated housing officers for residents with learning difficulties, improving the services we give to them and their support providers. The following month we employed Suzanne Pulchann as a dedicated income officer for tenants in sheltered and supported housing.



## August

### Estate improvement

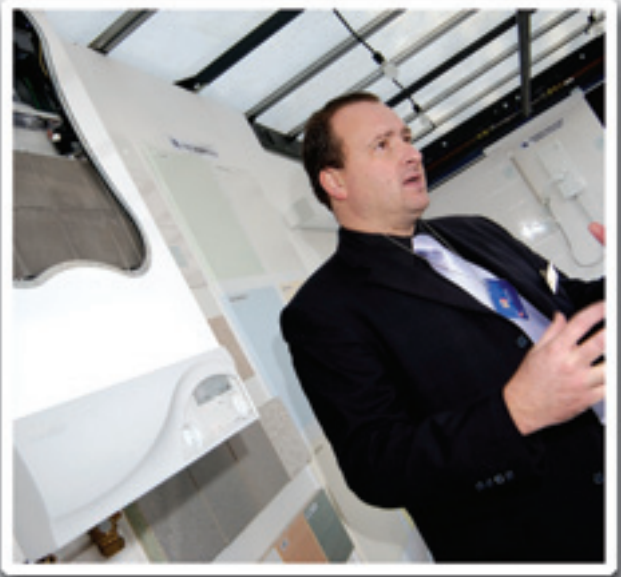


We started our Excellent Estates pilot programme having consulted residents before work began. This project has had an emphasis on customer involvement from the start, as we know changes will only be successful if they are what you want. We will continue to consult you as the project moves into its next stage, and hope to make many more improvements over the next few years.

## September

### Promises delivered

We completed our long-running programme of home improvements, bringing your homes up to, and often beyond, the Decent Homes standard. As well as kitchen and bathroom replacements, rewiring and heating upgrades, we have installed loft and cavity wall insulation in many properties, which should result in substantial energy efficiency savings.



## October

### Train to gain

We brought in new customer service training for all our customer facing staff, to help raise our level of service even further. We hope that as the training continues, you will begin to notice improvements in the way we deal with your queries. We also celebrated in style with our first Residents' Conference and our annual Community Spirit Awards.

## December

### Fixing repairs

In December all our customer service staff who deal with repairs attended diagnostic training, so that they can ask the right questions when they log your repairs. This will help us to deal much more effectively with your problems, and fix more of them on the first call-out.



## November

### House handover

We held a launch event to celebrate the handover of ten new homes at Hockerill Street in Bishops Stortford. The scheme received funding from both East Herts Council and the Stansted Area Housing Partnership, and offers both rented and shared ownership properties.

# Winter Money Worries

The Christmas period can put a strain on your finances, which this year may already be more stretched than normal. If you're worried about being able to pay your rent or would simply like help managing your money, South Anglia can help, along with other local organisations.

## Where to go for help?

Daley Calderon, our new money advisor, can advise you on debt problems or help you claim benefits, and you can have an appointment in our offices or your own home. We also have income officers who can give you support. Call Daley on **01376 559402** to arrange an appointment.

Your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** offers free advice on many things including debt management. Visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) or look in the phone book to find your local branch.

**National Debtline provides** FREE confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems. Their website has factsheets and a personal budget tool as well as sample letters to send to creditors.

[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk) or **0808 808 4000**.

**Consumer Credit Counselling Service** is a registered charity offering free, confidential advice and support to anyone who is worried about debt. They have an online debt counselling service and a free helpline with trained advisors.. [www.cccs.co.uk](http://www.cccs.co.uk) or **0800 138 1111**.

## Rent arrears

You must keep paying your rent over the festive season. Rent payments can be a worry for everybody, but it is important that you make rent a priority. If you are consistently behind with payments you could face court action. If you are struggling with your rent payments then please get in touch with us as soon as possible. We can help you put together a plan to pay your rent off at a steady pace without stretching your finances.

## Direct Debit Payments

Have you considered paying your rent by Direct Debit? This is a popular way of paying as you don't have to remember to make a payment each month. Simply call income team and arrange to pay a manageable, set amount on a regular basis and the payments will be taken automatically from your bank account. This will leave you with one less thing to worry about.



# Making the switch

There's not long to go until the country's analogue TV signal is shut down, and digital TV becomes the only option. Here's our no-nonsense guide to the digital switchover.




- **Will I need a new TV?**

Probably not. Your current one can almost certainly be converted using a digital box.

- **What if I already have digital TV?**

You need to make sure all your sets are converted to digital TV. If only your main set is digital you will need to buy a freeview box for the others, or add them to your digital TV subscription.

- **Will I need a new aerial?**

If your current aerial is getting good reception, it is unlikely you will need a new one. If you do need a new aerial, you should look for a Registered Digital Installer who carries the **digital**  logo. This means they have been trained and security checked. Work should cost between £80 and £150.

**You should never agree to have aerial work carried out by someone who calls without an appointment or has no identification.**

- **Can I get any extra help?**

If you're entitled to Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance or a mobility supplement, are registered blind or partially sighted or are over the age of 75 then you can get help with switching one TV set to digital. You will have to pay a subsidised amount of £40 towards it.

**We will be replacing aerials in shared or communal areas. If you have an individual aerial and it needs to be changed, we can help you find a Registered Digital Installer. Call us on 0800 694 0159 for more information.**

## Your views heard

When we carry our planned maintenance, such as replacing bathrooms and heating systems or external decorating, we always ask residents what they thought of the process and the finished result. This information is vital as it tells us what we got right, and where to make improvements next time.

We are delighted to report some excellent feedback and would like to thank everyone who has completed a questionnaire.

This is what you said...

### How many of you were satisfied with . . .

...being kept up to date through out the works programme?	96.6%
...the behaviour of the contractors?	99.1%
...the quality of the work?	98.7%
...the information provided about the work?	97.1%
...our response to your questions and concerns regarding the work?	97.9%
...us keeping appointments to carry out the works?	99%
...us in trying to keep the disruption to your home to the minimum?	99.1%
...the tidying up carried out by the contractor after the completion of the works?	99.2%

## Working together

Since the beginning of the AMS and Mears partnership, we have been adapting our services so that we can better meet your needs. Part of that process has been recruiting new staff.

To cover the day to day AMS activities, Craig Boulton has been appointed as Interim South Anglia Branch Manager, and Nicola Simmons is Interim Head of Customer Service, to help us focus on customer care.

You are telling us that the repairs service is improving, with a satisfaction rating for September of 93.3%. But we still want to do better. We'll update you on our progress in the next edition of Homelife.

# Celebrating the starts of our communities

At the end of October we celebrated the people who make a real difference to their communities at the South Anglia Community Spirit Awards. The gala event at the Rhodes Art Centre in Bishops Stortford was hosted by Martin and Su from Essex FM, and was attended by more than 85 people.

The Community Spirit Awards provide an opportunity for residents to nominate their neighbours who have done something special for their local communities. Every winner received a prize chosen just for them.



Pictured above: Winners of this year's South Anglia Housing Community Spirit Awards collect their awards

## The winners

### **Community Champion Tracy Clay, Bishops Stortford**

Tracy was nominated by her neighbour for all the times she's helped those around her. In the words of her neighbour, "she's an all round good egg who will help anyone!"

### **Young Achiever Francis Howard, Dagenham**

Eighteen year old Francis was nominated for the time and effort he put in to applying for funding and then organising Christmas outings last year for residents at The Vineries in Dagenham. He

spent time finding out what people wanted to do and then made it happen.

### **Inspiring Personality Shaun Cooke, Bishops Stortford**

Shaun had his leg partially amputated five years ago due to an industrial accident when he was helping a rail passenger who was trapped. He plays an active role in the Disability Action Group and was nominated for being "a true hero of our time".

### **Outstanding Neighbour Derrick Blackaby, Sawbridgeworth**

[didn't want his story publicised]

### **Special Recognition award Ron Roberts, Bishops Stortford**

Ron and his dog Lucky are the life and soul of his sheltered housing scheme. He organises social events and activities for residents – his mission is to get folks together to enjoy their days. He's easily recognisable in his customised mobility car and is known by his favourite phrase – 'mustn't grumble'. Ron was nominated for being the "nicest and most thoughtful of men, always looking for ways to help others."

### **Family awards Taren, Tegan and Lisa Poole**

When Taren, then 10, found her mum unconscious in bed last year,

she kept her cool, dialled 999 and contacted family for help. Her sister Tegan, then 6, stayed calm and also helped. Mum Lisa is facing a lung transplant and, according to the girls, is “the best mum ever!”

### **Alison and Gerald Brewer**

The Brewers were nominated by their daughter, Vicky, for making

her home a secure and happy place to grow up. Gerald has had a brain tumour for many years and continues with life with great bravery. Alison has cared for her husband and does all she can to make his life as easy as possible.

### **Gillian, Tracey and Luke Skinner**

Tracey and her 13 year old son Luke have both suffered from

brittle bone disease since early childhood. Tracey is brave and uncomplaining about her condition which has left her unable to walk without crutches. Luke also bears this with dignity and fortitude. Gillian – Tracey’s mother and Luke’s grandmother – nominated them both, and was herself nominated by a neighbour for the help she gives them.



## Main event

Also in October was the first ever South Anglia Tenants’ Conference, which gave residents the chance to talk face to face with our staff and partner agencies and learn more about our services. There was a buffet lunch, along with seminars from our property services team, the South Anglia Residents’ Forum with Mark Grimwood, and also from Groundwork, an environmental agency who talked about how to improve our green areas.

We asked the residents who attended to ‘have their say’ by helping to pick our priorities for the coming year.



## Audit update

We mentioned in the last newsletter that neighbourhood officers are visiting your homes to collect information. Lots of you ask us why we need to collect information that you consider to be personal. As a registered Housing Association we are legally required to demonstrate that we are providing services fairly to everyone regardless of their sex, race or any disability.

The information we gather helps us to improve our services to our residents. We will use the data to monitor our service delivery and performance, to make sure we are treating all tenants and members of the community equally. Also, by knowing more about who our tenants are, we are able to deliver services tailored to your needs.

The tenancy audits are ongoing, and if you haven’t yet received a visit, you may do soon. All our neighbourhood officers wear name badges, so you can be confident of who is knocking on your door. Should you have any worries, each name badge also has a phone number so you can call our offices and confirm their identity. Thank you for your cooperation with this, it really does help us make a difference.

# Meet the team...

## East Hertfordshire and Harlow

Over the next few issues we will be introducing some of our staff to you, updating you on changes and telling you a little about what the teams do to support you and your communities.

This issue we meet the Neighbourhood Officers who work in East Hertfordshire and our Berecroft Estate in Harlow.

**Mary Walsh** joined as Neighbourhood Manager in April 2008 and leads the team. Mary previously worked for Circle 33 and is very passionate about delivering high quality service to residents. Mary is supported by a team of Neighbourhood Officers and a Neighbourhood Assistant. Mary can be contacted **01279 714736**.



## East Hertfordshire Neighbourhood Officers

**Susan Holt-Smith**, a longstanding, experienced neighbourhood officer looking after Dimsdale area of Bishop's Stortford. She also manages Buntingford and the surrounding villages including Anstey, Ardley, Aspenden, Brent Pelham, Buckland, Cottered, Furneux Pelham, Hormead, Great Munden, Stock Pelham, Throcking, Westmill and Wyddail. Susan can be contacted on **01279 714739**.



Four new neighbourhood officers joined the team in September 2008 and have been settling well into their new roles. The four new recruits are:

**Sarah Cain** who comes from a teaching background, now manages Aston, Benington, Dane End, Datchworth, Walkern, Watton at Stone. Sarah can be contacted on **01279 714719**.



**Kate Donaldson** who returned to housing following a period of extensive travel now manages Heath Row and Plaw Hatch in Bishop's Stortford plus Bullfields and West Road in Sawbridgeworth together with High Wych and Eastwick. Kate can be contacted on **01279 714775**.



**Natalie Holmes** left housing for a stint in the travel industry but decided her passion was delivering a high standard of customer services within the housing sector. She now manages Albury, Braughing, Hunsdon, Little Hadham, Much Hadham, Puckeridge, Standon, Widford, Hertford and Ware. These areas were previously managed by Fiona Carroll who left South Anglia Housing in November. Natalie can be contacted on **01279 714738**.



**Steve Cherry**, also an experienced officer having previously worked at The Angle in Harlow. Steve now manages a number of areas around Bishop's Stortford including St Michael's Mead, Cavell Drive and Swallow Court. Steve can be contacted on **01279 714717**.



The team currently has one officer vacancy and this is being covered by **Gregory Obiweluzo**, a temporary member of staff. The areas covered by Greg include the Havers Lane area of Bishop's Stortford (including Benhooks Avenue and Benhooks Place, also Piggotts Way). It is hoped that a permanent member of staff will be in post early in 2009.

## Harlow Neighbourhood Officer

**Lorraine Murphy**, another experienced officer, has been working part time on Wednesdays and Thursdays managing approximately 170 properties on the Berecroft Estate. Lorraine also holds a surgery each Wednesday from 9am to 5pm at No 65 Berecroft.



Recently Lorraine decided that it was time for a change and was successful in her application to work for our sheltered housing team. Lorraine starts her new job in January 2009. The team wish Lorraine all the best in her new role and thank her for her hard work and support.

Following Lorraine's departure, management of the Berecroft Estate will transfer over to our Essex team headed by Mark Grimwood and a new Neighbourhood

Officer will be appointed. Residents will be notified once the person is in post.

## Harlow Neighbourhood Assistant

**Jonathan Dean** is the neighbourhood assistant. Jonathan puts together customer satisfaction surveys, allocates garages to residents and gives valuable support to the rest of the neighbourhood team.



Jonathan can be contacted on **01279 714758**.

Each of our full time neighbourhood officers looks after an average of 400 properties. Their responsibilities are varied, including all aspects of tenancy management (eg successions, assignments, change of name etc). Their role is also to ensure that estates are clean and safe. They carry out regular pre planned estate inspections and residents are always welcome to join them in the walkabouts. The officers are also keen to get your views and discuss any problems you are experiencing, particularly in relation to anti social behaviour.

Look out for them at our offices or around your area in the near future, they will be happy to say hello.

## Are you affected by mental health issues?

Do you know someone who suffers with a mental health problem? Statistics show that one in four British adults will experience a problem with mental health this year. Most of these people could be helped by proper diagnosis, treatment or support.

World Mental Health Day was on the 10th of October. It aims to challenge the way people with mental health problems are sometimes viewed by society, and to get them better access to services by raising awareness. We support this aim.

Many people are treated differently because their condition is not understood, or because extreme cases reported in the media suggest that people with mental ill health can be a threat to others. These cases are very rare, and only happen when people have the most severe conditions.

Debbie Lee is a mental health specialist working in

our Tenancy Sustainment Team. She has seen people suffer unnecessarily, and sometimes fail to receive the support they need. Although mental health issues can be hard for individuals and their carers, with proper support most people can live perfectly normal lives.

## Going walkabout

Would you like to help make a difference to another South Anglia estate? We can offer you the opportunity to meet other residents, get some fresh air and help us to improve the services we provide.

We're looking for volunteers to carry out estate walkabouts in South Anglia housing areas other than their own, to see whether we are meeting our service standards and to look for ways in which the areas could be improved. The walkabouts will happen quarterly. If you'd like to sign up to take part in our next or want to know more then please call Mark Grimwood on **01376 559409**.

## How we are performing?

We improved performance across all services in 2007/8 and expect to report further improvement at the end of 2009/10.

	Actual	Target
Rent & service charge collection	99.80% ☺	98.30%
Current tenants arrears	5.60% ☺	5.60%
Average number of days to re-let properties	42 days ☺	29 days
Vacant dwellings as a % of stock	1.70% ☹	1.20%
Reactive repairs completed in target	92.50% ☹	95%
Repairs completed at first visit	88.40% ☺	85%
Complaints per 1,000 units	93.10% ☹	95%
Customer satisfaction with repairs	92.60% ☺	92%

### Useful numbers

For all enquiries during office hours, please contact customer services on our brand new freephone number 0800 694 0159, or alternatively call our low cost local numbers on 0845 600 1543 or 01279 714 714.

#### General enquiries

Call 0800 694 0159  
 Fax 01279 714766  
 Email  
[southanglia.info@circleanglia.org](mailto:southanglia.info@circleanglia.org)

#### New Luton Office

Call 01582 808562

#### Write to us at:

South Anglia Housing  
 PO Box 3335  
 Anglia House  
 Norwich  
 NR7 7FZ

### On the net

Have you checked out the residents' website lately?

#### You can

- check your rent statement
- pay rent online
- use the 'benefits calculator' to check what you're entitled to
- read the latest news
- report repairs or check when they are likely to be carried out
- let the problem-solvers guide you to the right solution for a power or heating problem
- download your own copy of the home improvements schedule and other handy documents and much, much more



[www.circleanglia.org](http://www.circleanglia.org)



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