

Resident Checked



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Improvements to Old Ford's Customer Services



Left to Right – Back Row: John McCracken – Customer Service Advisor, Brenda West – Customer Service Advisor, Junior Stewart – Customer Service Advisor, Therese Quinn-Jones – Head of Customer Services and Amanda Edwards – Customer Service Advisor.

Left to Right – Front Row: Mohammed Jafor – Customer Service Advisor Team Leader sourced from Future Job Fund, Emma Tarafder – Customer Service Advisor, Kerry Danielson, Shelina Begum – Customer Service Advisor, Delyth Lynch Customer Service Advisor Team Leader and Abdul Gani – Customer Service Team Manager.

Last year Old Ford were inspected by the Audit Commission and it was found that we have some improvements to make to how residents access our Customer Services. From previous feedback from residents we had already started to think about the changes we need to make, based on some of the best

organisations around. We are aware it is frustrating to have to wait in separate queues to resolve your repairs and housing enquiries. We also know you would like to have your enquiries solved at the first point of contact. From listening to your views and by finding out what other organisations do, we will

be changing how you can access our services. We now have a single Customer Service's team. You will no longer have to queue twice as our new Customer Service staff will be able to solve the majority of your enquiries in a single visit, whether they are repairs, housing or parking enquiries.

You will still be able to contact us by phone or by popping in to the office. You can also access the services by e-mail or through our web-site at www.oldford.org.uk This move builds on the successful improvements to the service made last year. For example we reduced the average waiting time of calls

from 59 seconds to 25 seconds, which resulted in 43% fewer complaints. We are sure you will see a further improvement in the service, as a result of the feedback you have given us. If you can think of other ways we might improve, please do get in touch on **0800 073 0427**.

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3. Enter the quickcode: 'C' (2)

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sky



Circle news at the touch of a button!

Circle Digital is a new, easy way to access your landlord and local services, using Virgin or Sky TV, mobile phone, Nintendo Wii or PC. From checking out local events, reporting repairs, looking up bus times to booking a doctor's appointment – Circle Digital gives you more choice in how you contact us.

You can find information from your landlord, such as:

- repairs information and reporting
- anti-social behaviour advice and reporting
- home improvements and adaptations
- home ownership and transfer options
- news
- how to get involved
- rent and benefits advice

You'll also find local area information, such as:

- Jobcentre searches
- GP and NHS services
- Travel information
- Choice-based lettings

Additional services will be added so be sure to keep an eye on it.

Want to know more? Contact your landlord to find out more about the great new interactive service.



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NOTE FROM EDITOR



Hello and welcome to the Summer edition of Home Matters.

We have been working hard over the past few months to ensure that you are receiving Home Matters in the format that you want, whether it's in large print or audio we can provide this.

If you do require this newsletter in a different format please let us know by emailing residentcomms@circle.org.uk, write to Marketing Communications Team, Circle Housing Group, 6 Central Avenue, St Andrews Business Park, Norwich, Norfolk, NR7 0HR or ring 0800 073 0427.

If you wish to opt out of receiving this newsletter in paper format and receive it via email instead simply log on to www.circle.org.uk/optout and fill in the short form.



Resident Involvement in Home Matters

Home Matters is your magazine. Each quarter we aim to produce stories and features which you will find interesting. The information in Home Matters is written by staff and checked by a small group of residents.

We now want to get residents involved in deciding what should be featured in Home Matters. Getting more residents involved is one of our main priorities for this year. We think giving residents a greater say in what is included in Home Matters will help to make it even more

interesting and relevant to you.

So, tell us, what do you think of Home Matters? How can we improve it and make it more useful and interesting for you? Would you be prepared to give up an hour every three months to help shape the news stories we include? Would you like to write a column or feature in a future edition? We would love to hear your views and for you to get involved so please fill in the survey which is enclosed in this edition of Home Matters.

Gas safety



Gas Safety
Remember to be safe and let us in! Faulty or un-serviced appliances can give off a deadly colourless, odourless gas called carbon monoxide.

Housing benefit and account 3

There are important changes to benefits from April 2011 as part of the Government's Welfare Reform. These include changes to housing benefits for tenants and leaseholders and may affect the amount if;

- you receive Local Housing Allowance – this is the allowance that local authorities use to work out how much housing benefit private rented tenants can get if they are on low income
- you share your home with any adults who are not dependent on you such as an adult, children, parents, relatives and friends. In this case your housing benefit could be reduced as it is expected that they should contribute towards your housing costs, whether they do or not.

These changes may affect you if you have a current housing benefit claim, or if

you are making a new claim. There are more benefit changes on the way and we will inform you of these. If you are affected by any of these changes, please contact your Customer Service Manager. For welfare advice you can also visit one of the drop in sessions delivered by Account 3 and the Legal Advice Centre for Old Ford residents. You can also get general advice and assistance in areas of welfare benefits, rent arrears, council tax, Immigration advice, Housing/Homelessness, Employment law, Education law and Debt advice.

The service is provided by four weekly sessions at the Bow Idea Store and Old Ford Housing Office. Old Ford residents are welcome to either book an appointment for Thursday sessions only or drop in during the two hour sessions on Fridays.

Mondays 3pm – 5pm
Bow Idea Store

Wednesday 10am – 12pm
Bow Idea Store

Thursdays 10am – 12pm
Old Ford Housing
(appointment only)

Thursdays 6pm – 8pm
Bow Idea Store

Fridays 10am – 12pm
Old Ford Housing Office
(drop-in session)

For further information, please contact the Information, Advice & Guidance Team on 020 7364 5814 or contact your Customer Services Manager if you are a tenant regarding your rent

Royal celebrations for Old Ford

“You said...

you would like Old Ford to support residents to host street parties in Orchard Village and Bow to celebrate the royal wedding...

Here's what we did..."



Over 150 Old Ford residents attended the event at Matilda Gardens, the Tredegar Centre and at Orchard Village to celebrate the Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. There were a range of free activities including a magician, a bouncy castle and pearly kings and queens to entertain the whole family.

To celebrate the wedding the children who attended wrote a letter of congratulations and drew a picture, which are all being sent to Buckingham Palace. The event was organised by residents and funded jointly by Old Ford and the Residents Federation. Everyone had a great time. Some residents commented, 'lovely event, congratulations to the organisers', 'fab day, great to see the community coming together'.

This was the first event organised by residents for some time, we would like to

thank everyone who was on the organising committees and the helpers on the day. We would like more residents to join us in helping to organise more community events, if you are interested in getting involved please contact: **Sue Barleycorn on 0207 204 1501.**



Construction Training Centre

Shop 147 on Orchard village estate used to be a pound shop but has now been changed into a training facility by Old Ford, called the Construction Training Centre. The centre was officially opened early in 2011, after months of hard work by young people from Old Ford Construction, which is a social enterprise business, set up by Old Ford and the Bow Construction Training Initiative.

The Construction Training Centre is a learning space for the community and runs workshops in construction trades such as plumbing, electrical, carpentry or bricklaying. Recently a women's plumbing workshop was held at the centre over a six week period, where seven women took part and learnt basic plumbing skills.

We are planning more similar workshops in the centre. The centre can hold up to 15 people, it has a range of tools, offers a small kitchen facility and wash room and can be hired out to organisations and individuals who wish to run construction workshops.



To discuss future workshop programmes or hire please contact Monica Majumder on 07807 958 578 or 020 7315 1603



Old Ford's New Mobile Team

Old Ford are welcoming a new Mobile Team, of five operatives and one Team Leader. The role of the team is to collect bulk refuse on the estates, provide cover for caretaking staff when they are on leave and carry out additional tasks such as deep cleans within blocks and litter picking on large ground areas. One of the main duties of the

Mobile Team is to ensure that estates are free from bulk refuse. However an important note to make is that residents within Tower Hamlets receive two free bulk collections per year through Tower Hamlet Council. If residents living in Tower Hamlet have bulk items to collect they should contact Tower Hamlet's Street Line on 020 7364 5004.

Old Ford hawking service

Did you know... a hawking service is being employed by Old Ford to manage the levels of nuisance birds throughout our estates. By regularly flying hawks through the estates, nuisance birds become unsettled and are less likely to stay in the area due to the presence of a natural predator. Once control has been made across a site the number of visits from the hawking service can be reduced as the birds behaviour will change.

If there are particular areas which are affected by high numbers of



nuisance birds it is possible for our hawking service to focus on these areas until they are brought under control. Although this service brings nuisances birds under control it is not possible to completely get rid of them.

New development in Bow

A development at the old St Andrew's Hospital site at Bromley by Bow, will provide a total of 964 new homes. The development by Barratt Homes in partnership with Old Ford and the London Development Agency, will include 55 homes for Shared Ownership and 239 General Needs Social Rent properties.

The general needs homes will be managed in partnership with Spitalfields Housing Association and North London Muslim Housing Association. 30% of the housing is for families, with the houses having

three bedrooms or more. Three separate architects were involved in designing the scheme and the development won a Building for Life award for its excellent design.

The first phases have been handed over to Old Ford and Circle Living with the remainder of the affordable housing available between August and November 2011. The scheme is in a car parking free zone so does not allow application for local borough permits. Disabled badge car users can apply for local on street parking.



Your Neighbourhood needs you

Residents are at the centre of decision making and scrutiny at Old Ford. By finding out and representing the views of a wide group of residents the boards play a significant role in scrutinising our performance, holding us to account and shaping service improvements for the future.

Currently, we are recruiting new members to join the TML & Circle 33 Neighbourhood Management Board. The Board meets for two hours six times a year, usually in the evening. This is an unpaid role

but in return for your commitment we offer training and support, a chance to get to know your neighbours better and a role that helps to make a real difference to your neighbourhood and the life chances of others.

If this interests you, find out more about the role by contacting Scott Fissenden (phone 020 7204 1566 or e-mail scott.fissenden@circle.org.uk) for an informal chat or to request more information about the role.

News from the Resident and Service Users Panel



Circle's Residents and Service Users Panel (RASP) have been busy over the last few months. We don't just meet once a quarter, we all try to participate in the development of Circle's policies and practices in other events between our formal meetings.

Many members have been involved in the review of the repairs and maintenance service, which is of course one of the main contacts that residents have with Circle. Our members have attended two large events where the details of the service have been discussed and some have participated in smaller groups going over the fine detail of what is involved in the service – improving the service where it is needed and building on the best practices across the whole of Circle.

RASP members' knowledge of residents' experience of how repairs and maintenance are carried out in every part of the country where Circle has properties has been a

useful addition to this review.

RASP is unique in that it involves people from across the whole of Circle but we are also busily trying to make sure that we all know about other parts of the group, beyond where we happen to live. For that reason we've started on a programme of visits to all of the areas where Circle provides housing and services, to look around and get a feel for the special conditions in each area.

We've been to Mole Valley in Surrey and most recently visited the Mercian housing association in the West Midlands. We spent the day looking at the very varied housing that Mercian provides. From a scheme aimed at young people who have been previously

homeless to a very impressive sheltered housing scheme – with plenty in between.

We discussed the difficulties of funding new housing provision in the current climate and many other questions facing the housing sector at the moment. I think all the RASP members learnt a lot from that day and are looking forward to future visits.

Our next formal meeting is in September but before that RASP members will be involved in a range of events so that we can make sure the views of residents and service users are heard in every part of Circle.

Alison Hill
RASP chair

Leaseholders and Shared Owners



Shared Ownership Units Available at Bow Junction



Circle Living have a number of one bedroom shared ownership properties available at the popular St Andrews site in Bow Junction. Built by Barratts, Bow Junction is part of the St Andrews development. A stunning collection of spacious, contemporary properties with easy access to the City and Canary Wharf, with Bromley By Bow Station (Hammersmith & City and District Line) and Devons Road DLR only minutes away.

Shared Ownership allows you to own a property on a part buy, part rent basis and helps you buy a home in stages. You may purchase a share you can afford whilst paying a subsidised rent on the remainder. It also gives you the opportunity to purchase further shares in the future, in order to own the property outright if you wish. 25% shares available from £46,250 (full market value £185,000). To qualify you must be registered with First Steps www.firststepslondon.org for Shared Ownership, have an income of between £25,000 and £50,000 and live in one of the 8 East London boroughs.

If you would like further information or wish to view the show apartment please contact Karen Kelly on 0845 304 1002 or email karen.kelly@circle.org.uk

Major Works Surgeries

If you would like to discuss payment options for your Major Works bill then please contact your Income Officer Tahmina Begum on 020 7204 1543.

Tahmina will be available for an evening surgery on 7th October 2011 but please contact Tahmina to arrange an appointment before attending.

Residents review repairs service

Listening to what customers want, convenient appointment slots and being kept updated about contractor arrival times were just some of the issues on the agenda at two customer workshops to discuss our repairs and maintenance service.



The workshops, which were organised as part of a major review of our repairs and maintenance service, brought together customers from across the group to discuss what they thought were the key things that make a great service.

We recently carried out some in-depth customer research which helped us to identify a number of service areas we need to look at and improve. As part of that process we have been reviewing

everything about our repairs and maintenance service; from the way we fix small problems, to how we look after the overall quality of your homes.

Gary Wilkinson, who has been leading the review said: "The people best placed to tell us what works, what doesn't and what we could do better, is our customers. That's why they are playing an important part of this review. As one customer who attended the events put it 'nobody knows your homes like we do, we are living in them.' Exactly right.

"These customer workshops have been really interesting and given us plenty to think about. One of the issues that comes up time and time again is communication. For example, people said being kept informed about expected contractor arrival times and listening to what the customer wants was important.

"That's good to know, because listening is exactly what we are doing."

Details about the outcome of the review will be published on our website in the summer and in the next edition of Home Matters.

Old Ford up for Excellence



Old Ford together with its major works partner Apollo, recently attended the National Housing Excellence Awards held in Manchester.

Old Ford and Apollo were one of the five finalists nominated for 'Partnering Scheme of the year'. We were up against hundreds of other applicants for the Partnering Award and unfortunately just missed out to St Mungos and the City of London.

Being shortlisted for the award has been major achievement for Old Ford as there are a large number of Housing Associations and Local Authorities carrying out Decent Homes plus works across the country. This nomination also reflects the hard work, dedication and commitment that our staff, Apollo and residents have put in to the Parkside project to make it a success. Old Ford remains the only housing association to be awarded 3 stars for its major works.

June Morton, Managing Director of Old Ford said: "It's a fantastic achievement and something we can all be very proud of, unfortunately we did not win but that does not take away the fact that we are achieving at an extremely high national level."



Check out our website at www.oldford.org.uk for our latest videos which offer some top tips on saving energy and home repairs.

Capoeira classes for residents

Old Ford are running Capoeira classes for residents and the wider community at Orchard Village. Capoeira is a Brazilian style of martial arts and includes music, dance, acrobatics and culture. The sessions are held every Monday in the newly refurbished dance studio at Orchard Village.

Capoeira was developed through martial arts used by slaves as a form of self

defence. The classes can boost confidence and self esteem as well as improving physical fitness and flexibility. The sessions are completely free and give an opportunity to learn self defence moves and be creative by using hand made wooden instruments.

Residents have said they thoroughly enjoyed the weekly sessions when they have had the opportunity to make new friends and keep fit.



For further information about Capoeira contact Monica Majumder on 020 7315 1603 or on 07807 958 578.

Tower Hamlets Local Offer – Old Ford's offer to residents

As with all housing associations, we are required to work with residents to set a series of local offers which we will commit to delivering.



At the door knocking event we held in summer 2010 residents were consulted on what these offers might be. This was supported by residents taking part in discussions with residents from other associations in Tower Hamlets.

Following this, the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum agreed the following list of local offers we will make to our residents:

Repairs

- A minimum of 95% of repairs appointments will be made and kept
- We meet or exceed a minimum satisfaction level of 95% for our repairs service
- We will benchmarking our repairs service on performance and costs and tell you how we compare

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

- We will acknowledge reports of ASB within one working day
- We will continue to offer a 24 hour and weekend reporting service for ASB
- We will make available information about our ASB service on our website

Value For Money

- We will publish the cost of our caretaking service and how this compares with others
- We will continue to make choice available where possible so residents can pay for a better kitchen or bathroom on new developments and internal improvement
- Residents will be involved in the monitoring of repairs contractor performance and will be provided with information about costs and performance
- A number of residents will be trained in order to be able to take part on the procurement of repairs

and estate services

- residents will be given information on cost of services for their block

These offers are in addition to the promises we made at transfer, for example, we will continue to deliver the Decent Homes internal and external works programme on the Parkside estates and 555 new homes at Orchard Village.

New Service Measures

Old Ford, as part of the Circle Group, has also introduced a series of new service measures. These are our service commitments to you, our residents. Some are the same as the local offers but others include:

- Having your repair completed on the first visit
- Satisfaction that your local area is safe and clean
- Having your views taken into account when making decisions
- The opportunity to get involved in decisions which affect the service you receive



- Clear and timely response to service requests.

In the coming months we will be setting clear targets for each of the new service measures and we will report on these periodically through Home Matters,

resident involvement scrutiny meetings and on our web-site. Look out for more information in the autumn edition of Home Matters.

Tenant Handbook

We have revised the Old Ford tenants' handbook and will be giving them to all new tenants. If you would like a copy of the new handbook please stop by the offices, ring or email us or download from our website.

Old Ford
Enhancing Life Chances

End of year performance update 2010/11

2010/11 was a good year for Old Ford with lots to celebrate and many improvements in the performance of services. In this edition of Home Matters we look back at what improvements we've made in the last year.

% Overall satisfaction with the landlord service – better than last year. We have a project in place to drive up satisfaction further and we would welcome your views on this.

75.1%

% Calls answered within 30 seconds – at the time of inspection in Jan-2010, 51% of repairs calls were answered. Now 93% of repairs calls are answered, 73% are answered within 30 seconds and the average call waiting time is down to 25 seconds – all significantly better than last year.

81%

% Complaints resolved at the first stage – better than last year. 43% fewer complaints and 1/3rd more compliments than complaints. 89% of complaints responded to within 10 days – all better than last year.

88.7%

% emergency repairs completed in target by Mears – this year we completed 2,787 emergency repairs, 1,609 (64%) fewer than last year but performance was not quite as good.

97.1%

98.3%

% Non-emergency repairs completed in target by Mears – over 12,000 urgent and routine repairs completed of which 11,826 were completed on time – better than last year.

% Income collection – your rent pays for the services you receive so it is important that we get all the rent we are due – performance in 2010/11 was better than last year and among the top 25% of organisations in London.

100.5%

Inspection Update

In January 2010 our repairs service was audited on behalf of our regulator, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Since then we have developed and delivered an improvement action plan.

As a result of these actions our performance has improved in a number of key areas. The highlights are:

- Satisfaction with the last repairs has improved by **4.9%** since the inspection and is currently better than target at **91%**
- **20%** more repairs calls are answered; now **93%**
- Call waiting time has fallen by almost a minute to **25 seconds** on average
- There were **43%** fewer complaints compared with last year and better performance with **89%** responded to in **10 days**, up by **32%** since inspection



- On average **3.3%** more repairs are completed on time since the inspection, up to **97.8%**
- Gas safety remains at **100%**; fire safety is also **100%**

Our action plan, which residents helped to develop, has now been completed. But we are still introducing new improvements to the service including the new customer service team mentioned on the front page.

Homes with a valid gas safety certificate – safety is one of our highest priorities. Last year we completed 100% of safety checks with 92% satisfaction and 100% of Fire Risk Assessments.

100%

As well as the impressive improvements detailed above, we have delivered 121 new homes at Orchard Village, new homes at St Andrews in Bromley-by-Bow, improved 258 homes bringing them up to Decent Homes plus standards, and improved overall satisfaction with the repairs last repair by up to 6% to 91.6%, 17% more diversity information known helping us to shape services to meet your needs. We also delivered 100% of the inspection action plan on time. We've got more to do but we are sure you will agree, this is a good start.

There is more information about our performance on the Old Ford website. Visit www.olford.org.uk

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