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Residents get on the first rung on the qualification ladder in housing

Karen Stannard and Danny Monk knew very little about housing before they signed up to take the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Level 2 certificate. But that didn't stop them snapping up the opportunity to take the recognised qualification when Russet offered the 14 week course for free to residents.



Karen, a wheelchair user, explained: "I am really keen to start up my own consultancy advising organisations on how to adapt facilities to make them more accessible for people with disabilities. I felt by taking a housing qualification it would put me in a better position especially when dealing with

surveyors, architects and occupational therapists."

Danny who has been medically retired for some years told us: "I was really chuffed to pass. I certainly couldn't have taken it without Russet's sponsorship and support.

"I particularly enjoyed spending a day with a Russet

voids officer. We inspected an empty property to establish what work was required to prepare it ready to re-let. I am now going to try and find work experience to take me a step further."

If you are interested in any training opportunities please ring Marilyn Smith on 01732 781952.



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Need help with your finances this New Year?



Don't be tempted by loan sharks, they will only add to any financial problems. If you are approached by a loan shark call 0300 555 2222.

There is plenty of free money advice available and organisations that can help you. These include:

The Citizens Advice Bureau: www.citizensadvice.org.uk or www.adviceguide.org.uk

The Financial Services Authority: Visit www.moneyadviceclear.fsa.gov.uk/publications or call 0300 500 5000 for a range of free guides on topics including budgeting and borrowing money.

Your local credit union.

Lee Spring on 01732 780999 or by email: lee.spring@russethomes.org



MD welcome

You have probably heard some of the announcements which the Government has made on housing. The main headlines are new tenants may not necessarily receive a tenancy for life, and some rents might increase up to 80% of the level of private sector rents – mainly to help us afford to build new homes.

Whilst we are still waiting for the detail to emerge I want to give you some reassurances at this stage. If you are an existing tenant then so long as you keep to your tenancy agreement, you will keep your tenancy for life. Also, the new higher rents are primarily designed for some (not all) of our homes let to new tenants.



We will of course keep you up to date on when these changes will be introduced and how they affect the way we work at Russet.

Steve Woodcock

Managing Director
Russet

How would you like to be involved?



Did you know that you can get involved with Russet in a way that suits you? Our Resident Involvement Framework gives you the chance to get involved in the services that we provide from your armchair or the Russet Boardroom, and everything in between.

We really want your opinion on our services and how we provide them. If you are interested in shaping what we do for you in the future and looking at how we are performing, let us know and we'll show you all the options for getting involved to help you chose.

For example:

- > mystery shopping
- > resident groups
- > consumer panel

If you want to have an informal chat phone
Melanie McAdam
01732 780999 ext 2716.

Think before you flush or unplug

Residents often ring our repairs call centre about problems with blocked toilets and basins. Please help us to keep costs down by trying to prevent blockages and clearing them yourself if they occur.

Top tips to prevent blockages:

- Don't put non-food waste, wet wipes, sanitary towels or disposable nappies down sinks or toilets.
- In basins and baths, use wire gauze over the sink hole when you wash your hair – it stops hair getting into the trap and blocking it.
- After cooking, do not dispose of fat down the kitchen sink – it solidifies and blocks the waste pipe. Instead, when cold pour into waste plastic bottles.
- Add tea leaves and bags to your compost – they are another major factor in blocked kitchen sinks and it is kinder to the environment to recycle them.
- Use a plunger (from any good DIY or hardware store).
- Unscrew and clean plastic pipe work under sinks, baths and basins.

Section 11 of our Tenant Handbook sets out some simple things you can do if you get a blockage including:



If a problem occurs beyond your control, contact our repairs service on 0800 197 2880. Remember, if we have to attend to a blockage unreasonably caused by a customer, the full costs will be recharged (minimum £30 charge).

Tenant Board Member selection

To make it easier for residents to put themselves forward to become one of our four Tenant Board Members, our Board has agreed to change the selection process.

We plan to replace the all-tenant ballot with a simple application and interview. This will provide better value for money and make sure that selected Tenant Board Members have the knowledge and skills to represent you at the highest level. It is also the way we select our non-tenant Board Members, so it will keep the process consistent and fair for everyone.

Interested? Look out for more information in the next edition of Home Matters.

Four families move into spacious new homes

Four local families were delighted to be handed the keys to their spacious new affordable homes in Gravesend.

Spread over three floors each home has three bedrooms, garden and under croft parking offering much needed family sized homes in the area. One single mum with three young children is particularly pleased to be offered a home with extra space after living in a property which was heavily overcrowded. Following a relationship breakup she had been forced to move back in with her mother who already had three children of her own living at home.

The homes have been developed by Russet together with Gravesham Borough Council and funded by the Homes and Communities Agency.



Neighbourhood Watch



During a regular surgery held by PCSO Linda Baker at Frome Court residents said they were keen to set up a Neighbourhood Watch. They wanted to learn how they can help one another reduce the risk of burglars, bogus callers and vandals gaining access to their homes.

Residents aged between 60 and 90 years living at the sheltered housing scheme received a safety talk and stickers from a Neighbourhood Watch liaison officer who explained a few simple measures people can take to help protect them, and their homes.

Ivanna Roberts-Cillia, Russet's Head of Housing, said: "Neighbourhood Watch is not just about reducing crime – it's about building community spirit and good relations."

"Although Frome Court is not a particular target of crime it has had a couple of incidents of people trying to gain access and bogus callers. We want all our residents to feel confident, safe and secure in the place they live and encourage them to be vigilant and be sure they know who it is visiting before they let them in."

PCSO Linda Baker said: "It's mostly common sense and re-enforcing safety messages but the scheme also makes sure residents know what to do and who to contact should they suspect something is wrong."

If you would like to set up a neighbourhood watch scheme in your area contact Paul Harfleet on 01732 379377.

What a great invitation

We asked children of all ages to take part in a colouring competition to help us design an invitation for our staff conference. We asked everyone to use their imagination and draw anything to do with the Olympic Games – our theme for the day.

We had some fantastic entries and Jessica Lake aged 8 yrs from Snodland was voted the winner for her colourful drawing of a swimmer.



What can we offer you!

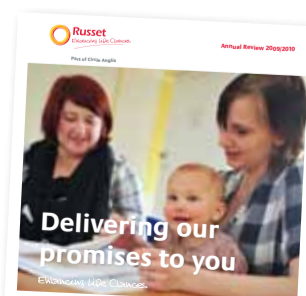
We recently sent you our Resident Review which explained how we are putting together 'local offers'. Local offers are service standards that we have agreed with you to deliver and monitor our performance.

We have been talking to tenants on our Focus Users

Service Standard (FUSS) groups to shape these local offers and will be writing to you to make sure that you are happy with what we have agreed together.

We will start delivering our local offers to you from April and need your help to make sure we deliver what we said we would. If you want to get involved in either setting

the offers or making sure we are delivering on them, give Melanie McAdam or Lee Spring a call on 01732 780999.



Performance Matters *July – September 2010*

We use Key Performance Indicators – a set of industry standard measures to monitor how well a range of services are doing;

Performance indicator	Target	Actual
Collecting rent – for every pound due to us	£1.00	£1.00
Empty homes – days taken to re-let	30 days	29.4 days
Gas servicing – homes with a valid Gas Safety Certificate	100%	100%
Home repairs – appointments made and kept	95%	90%
Emergency repairs – completed on time	98%	98.9%
Customer service – correspondence answered within 7 days	100%	99.3%

Evictions

Evictions are a last resort. If you have problems paying your rent contact your Income Recovery Officer as we can usually help. If you are causing nuisance or anti-social behaviour then you need to stop so we don't have to take court action against you.

Eviction Date	Who	Why
September	Single man, Tonbridge	Rent arrears
October	Single man, Snodland	Rent arrears
October	Couple and dependant, Tonbridge	Rent arrears

If you are evicted for arrears or anti-social behaviour we won't re-house you and it is very unlikely that the Council will either, even if you have children.

By responding to our Questback Repairs telephone survey and returning their gas service feedback forms the following have won our monthly draw...

Month	Repair Winners
July	Ms Buckley, Aylesford
August	Mrs Benstead, West Malling
September	Miss Wilson, Wrotham
Month	Gas Winners
July	Mrs Lucas, East Malling
August	Mr & Mrs Fitzer, Tonbridge

Have you received your calendar?

Residents working on the Resident Involvement Statement suggested we produce a 2011 calendar as a thank you for your continued support and involvement. The calendar, delivered in December, highlights cultural and social events throughout the year. It contains useful contact numbers for our contractors and also explains the various ways you can get involved. We asked you to tell us about your hobbies and achievements and have captured a few in the great photographs.

We hope you enjoy your calendar and find it useful. If you have any comments please contact Marilyn Smith on 01732 781952.



S G G F N A H S S B E C T J F
 G N I T A K S E L I R H A A P
 B R O S F E R A A S I I I N P
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 Q W N Y H G E V L P D T T W Y

Can you find these words?

BLANKET	HAT	SNOW
BOOTS	HEATING	SNOWMAN
CHILL	ICE	SOUP
DARKNESS	JANUARY	STEW
FIRE	RESOLUTIONS	TOBOGGAN
FROST	SCARF	WINTER
GLOVES	SKATING	

If so, you could win £50! Send your completed entry, along with your Name _____ Address _____

to: Prize Wordsearch, Basted House, Harrison Road, Borough Green, Sevenoaks, TN15 8PB. Closing date: 4 March 2011. Last issue's winner: R. A. Weeks, Plaxtol.

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