



Russet

Enhancing Life Chances

**Resident
Checked** ✓



2010 - 2011 In Review

Russet

How has the last year



Russet's
Managing
Director
Steve Woodcock
(left) discusses
the last 12
months
with resident
David Dale
(far right)

Interviewer: It's been another busy year at Russet and a year since you made the local offer promises to residents in the last review. How has it been and what has gone well?

Steve: There are quite a few highlights. The Decent Homes work finished in November. Since 1991 we have spent £170 million bringing homes up to the standard the Government wanted. Residents have had lots of influence, from choosing contractors to selecting new bathrooms, front doors and new roofs.

In the last year we have built 130-140 new homes. We launched our estate caretaker pilot scheme, Russet Extra, in Winterfield and Saltings Road, in Barming and Longmead. Residents had told us the estates could be tidier, graffiti dealt with quicker and minor repairs done more quickly. If successful we will roll it out to other areas.

We set up a Sustainable Communities Team which has done many things, including helping residents claim £650,000 of benefits. They also help to integrate communities, with projects to bring people together, particularly young people. Our work at Winterfield was recognised by The Young Foundation.

We have been working on co-regulation which means getting residents involved as much as board members and the regulator in terms of managing Russet. We have made a real effort to get more tenants involved this year. There are user groups for repairs and housing management.

We had a mock internal inspection which was very helpful to focus on priorities for improvement for the next year and get an outside opinion.

David: I was involved in the inspection and thought it was a very helpful exercise. I was helped by the Sustainable Communities team- I found the support invaluable. With what is happening with Government cuts I would like to see that team expanded.

I understand a lot of work has been going on at the Airfield estate in East Malling, where junior wardens are being trained to look after their area. Do you see that expanding to other areas?

Steve: We do, we think it is a great idea, people can monitor and take pride in their area.

David: I've noticed that recently you changed some of your subcontractors. Is this as a result of resident feedback?

Steve: It is. We have different ways tenants can feed back, including via a survey when work is done, mystery shopping and through the resident involvement repairs group. We listened to feedback and where there were issues around subcontracting, we've made changes to improve the service.

Interviewer: So what hasn't gone so well this year?

Steve: When a tenant first calls, sometimes they are not sure who to ring and they are kept on hold longer than we would like. This year we will change things so the first

gone at Russet?

person they call can answer most of the questions. This will free up time for housing officers and surveyors to be out on the estates, which residents tell us they would like to see.

David: I've had no problems contacting Russet. I understand you are hoping to relieve pressure on the receptionists.

Steve: Rather than going to a receptionist callers will be put straight through to someone who can answer their question. People can still come to the offices.

David: Have you thought about an electronic customer service agent so you can ask questions on the internet?

Steve: That is an excellent idea. Circle as a whole is undertaking a Business Transformation project. Over time we will transform the business, that is exactly the sort of thing being looked at. Residents can now contact us by phone, internet, tv or in person, whichever they prefer. We won't lose face to face contact and will push to get people out onto the estates as it is still the most important way to communicate.

David: For residents with only electric, they are really feeling the pinch in terms of cost.

Steve: Among other things we are looking at the Affordable Warmth project, things like insulating homes, giving advice about getting the best deal on utility bills and the possibility of solar panels on roofs so residents will benefit from reduced fuel bills.

David: With storage heating, at the moment if someone has problems you still put the old type in, but there are now more efficient storage heaters.

Steve: We need to look at that. We also try to get balance between keeping technology up to date and making sure it is not an expensive experiment.

Interviewer: What is the best example of residents helping to shape services at Russet?

Steve: At the Airfield estate in West Malling youngsters said there was nothing to do so they have been involved in creating a play area there. That recently opened, we listened to people on the estate and we have made a real difference to their environment.

When residents are involved it really helps Russet to focus on what is important to them. We can't make communities but we can encourage communities to come together and help each other.

David: Involving residents in the management of Russet gives a fresh insight from the other side of the fence. There should be more people involved, but I'm not sure how. With people struggling to make ends meet it will be difficult to get them to give up time.

Steve: We are linking up with Kent Credit Union this year too, which will have a positive impact on residents and lead to affordable credit for residents.

David: What can Russet do to help residents facing increased financial difficulty?

Steve: Make sure we get involved at an earlier point, deal with queries before problems with rent arrears, and help residents access benefits etc.



Getting you involved

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Russet HA	Golding Homes	Town & Country	Raven	West Kent
Satisfaction with views taken into account	80.8%	68.4%	48.4%	66.0%	57.0%
Satisfaction with landlord services	90.8%	87.8%	79.2%	78.0%	84.0%
Complaints resolved at first stage	89.3%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

My Say



Karen Stannard has been involved with Russet in many different ways. She undertook the housing course, job shadowed staff, was involved in helping select our grounds maintenance and cleaning contractors and is involved in both FUSS and TRUG (Focus User Service Standard Group and Tenant Repair User Group).

“It is an absolute pleasure to be a Russet resident and I’m proud to say that to my friends when asked. It hasn’t always been that way but over the last two years Russet has gone from strength to strength.

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- put together our Resident Involvement Framework with residents
- formed new Focus User Service Standard (FUSS) groups were formulated for each area of the business as part of this framework
- used the FUSS groups to help us put together our local offers for residents who will be checking to make sure we deliver on them
- involved young people in upgrading their play area on the Airfield estate after they contacted us for help
- carried out three mystery shopping exercises with residents, carrying out 125 'shops'
- organised a trip to Kent Museum of Life for more than 200 residents. along with Russet Residents' Federation
- helped residents complete a housing course which included job shadowing staff
- involved residents in selecting new grounds maintenance and cleaning contractors

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- continue to provide support and training to residents
- offer residents a range of opportunities to be involved in the management and review of their homes and communities including evolving a scrutiny role.
- ask residents what they want us to improve in their area
- formulate Neighbourhood Action Plans with residents
- introduce resident void inspectors to make sure we are letting homes that residents want to live in

Giving you what you asked for...

**Offer support
and training
to residents**

**Offer a wide range of
opportunities for
residents to be
involved in the
management and
review of their homes
and communities**

**Consult
residents
on local
services**



Looking after your homes

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Russet HA	Golding Homes	Town & Country	Raven	West Kent
Repairs completed on time	99.4%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
Satisfaction with repairs	95.9%	81.6%	66.0%	72.0%	84.0%
Homes meeting Decent Homes standard	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%	100.0%	99.3%
Homes with valid gas safety certificate	100.0%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

My Say



Mrs Ballard and her daughter have always had solid fuel heating. With the cold weather in December and the existing system needing replacement, we recommended installing gas fired central heating. Unfortunately there was no gas supply to the home and a new gas pipe and meter had to be installed first, which Russet helped organise. Swale Heating put in the heating system which was completed just before the first snowfall. "It really makes a difference to us" said Mrs Ballard, "It was the warmest Christmas for 30 years since we moved to the house!"

Highlights from 10/11

All Russet homes met the Government's Decent Homes Standard – the final 60 needing kitchens, bathrooms and loft insulation were completed in November 2010.

We have also:

- o installed new A-rated gas boilers to 336 homes which use up to 20% less gas than old boilers meaning lower fuel bills and less CO2 emissions
- o serviced gas appliances in all homes within the 12 month period required and extended the service to home owners
- o worked to increase satisfaction with responsive maintenance – a record 96% satisfaction was achieved
- o renewed flat roofs and windows to 35 flats in Saltings Road, Snodland
- o continued home improvements programme by installing 296 new kitchens and 246 new bathrooms
- o changed our external painting contractor with an increase in customer satisfaction to 97% and saved more than £100,000 per year by extending painting cycles to take account of improvements in paint technology
- o helped over 770 elderly or disabled customers with home decorating
- o maintained our commitment to disabled customers by committing more than £300,000 for home adaptations

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o make sure all our homes continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard and all work meets the Circle Standard
- o continue to ensure the highest possible standards in the management of gas, asbestos, water, electrical safety and controlling the risk of fire are maintained – over £2m is earmarked for this.
- o ensure the views of residents are at the heart of shaping the Business Transformation process affecting all our maintenance and home improvement services
- o set up a local caretaking service
- o work to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, including ongoing schemes to upgrade boilers and loft insulation. Also there will be a pilot project to evaluate external insulation to properties with solid wall construction
- o ensure resources continue to be directed to meet the needs of disabled people

Provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas

Offer an effective aids and adaptations service meeting residents' needs

Giving you what you asked for...



Providing homes

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Russet HA	Golding Homes	Town & Country	Raven	West Kent
Average re-let turnaround times (days)	30.5	29.7	43	23.4	24.8
Dwelling vacant	0.7%	0.9%	1.2%	0.8%	1.1%

My Say



Mr and Mrs Spicer used the Smooth Move scheme to downsize from a three bedroom home to a two bedroom home.

“Having one point of contact to take us through all the different processes made what would have been a very stressful experience far more manageable,” they said.

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- o started advertising our empty homes on screens in our reception areas as well as Kent Homechoice website
- o included feedback on how the homes were allocated
- o provided information folders in our reception areas
- o giving advice and guidance on how to apply for housing and include a copy of the local council's allocations scheme
- o published a new moving home booklet for residents
- o revised and updated information given to tenants when they move into a home
- o carried out a successful pilot of the Smooth Move scheme assisting residents wanting to move to a smaller home or overcrowded households

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o introduce the Smooth Move scheme following a successful pilot scheme to assist residents with moving to smaller homes and offering advice for overcrowded households
- o work jointly with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to give information on rents and housing costs to applicants to help them make decisions about housing
- o update our Conditions of Tenancy DVD so new residents are clear on their responsibilities
- o review how we deal with empty homes to reduce the amount of time they are empty

Giving you what you asked for...

Training for prospective tenants to help them understand the responsibilities and conditions of tenure and what services they can expect from us

Starter tenancies for new tenants as a tool for combating anti-social behaviour along with other remedies and approaches

Conditions of tenancy DVD and clear and easy to follow tenants' handbook



Building communities

“Russet has a duty to maintain and safeguard neighbourhoods and communities, working with partner organisations and agencies where necessary.”

My Say



Russet is committed to working with residents to prevent and resolve any problems of anti-social behaviour.

We respect residents' wishes to remain anonymous, but one family who had been experiencing problems with anti-social behaviour, said: “We’d like to thank you... from the bottom of our hearts for your support and help throughout this very trying period - you have been absolute stars!”

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- involved residents in new grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts
- spent £70,000 on work highlighted from estate inspections carried out with residents
- introduced a budget for anti-social behaviour solutions such as soft door closers and floor coverings
- continued successful working with the local Community Safety Partnership including the local authority and the police
- part funded the Tonbridge and Malling Citizens Advice Bureau

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- continue to plan improvements for communal areas in blocks, fences and paths
- consult with residents to produce a new information guide on anti-social behaviour
- work with residents to review how we deal with nuisance and anti-social behaviour

Giving you what you asked for...

We will keep neighbourhoods and communal areas we manage clean and safe

A planned programme for priorities agreed with residents such as upgrading communal areas, fences and paths

Specific targets for addressing quick solutions to ASB such as soft door closers and floor coverings



Offering value for money

Every pound of your rent money goes into the services we provide. Here is how we spend it. The figures in brackets are from 2009/10.



Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- o identified that in comparison to other similar housing associations in the south east we are low cost. In our peer group we are 3rd lowest cost out of 83 providers
- o been told via an external assessment that our strengths outweigh our weaknesses in terms of our approach to value for money
- o been told by 84% of residents, in our last full scale survey, that their rent was value for money
- o circle group has invested in a specialist procurement team to deliver us further savings in our contracts
- o put in place individual value for money objectives for all staff

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o re-procure our maintenance contracts to deliver even better value for money
- o consider further joint working with our Circle partners in the south east
- o undertake more work to understand our costs and streamline our processes

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Russet HA	Golding Homes	Town & Country	Raven	West Kent
Rent collected as % of rent due	100.1%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
Current resident arrears as % of rent due	2.1%	2.6%	4.4%	2.2%	2%



Making decisions

Russet's Board is made up of 10 members – six independents and four residents. It's their job to ensure Russet is well managed, financially viable and performs to a high standard.

One of the resident board members is also a member of Russet Residents' Federation so provides a valuable link between the two groups.

About you

Age:
More than 30% of Russet residents are aged 65 and over

Gender:
60% of Russet residents are women

Ethnicity:
54% of Russet residents are white, 2% are of mixed ethnicity, 1% are Asian (including Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, less than 1% are Black (including Caribbean and African). Data is not available for 44% of residents

Disability:
16% of Russet residents said they have a disability, 21% said they do not have a disability and the other 63% did not reveal that information

How have residents been involved in this document?

A copy of last year's residents' review was sent to every resident. Within it we included a survey asking for feedback and offering the chance to join our Communications Connectors group.

Based on what you told us we have made several changes this year. This includes simplifying the text to be more resident friendly, not using technical jargon and reducing the corporate feel of the document.

Feedback from this group means that this year we will not send this document to every resident. A summary version will be included within the Autumn 2011 edition of our resident newspaper Home Matters. Copies of the full document will be sent to any resident that requests one and a PDF version of the document will also be available on the Russet website.

Our Communications Connectors group now has nearly 300 residents signed up and we asked them what format they would like this document to take this year and what information.

By not sending copies to every resident we will save paper wastage and money that can be spent on the services you want to see improved.

A Russet resident took part in an interview for the introduction to this document. This was to give an honest and transparent view on how the last year has gone.



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You can view our policies, publications and your tenant handbook on our website.

If you would like this document in large print, Braille, audio, an alternative format or in a different language contact us.

Part of the Circle Housing Group

We're one of 12 partners within Circle. Being part of a larger group means we have more financial security and more influence to achieve better deals with suppliers to deliver value for money for you.

We are first and foremost a Registered Provider and charity. We retain our individual and independent approach and run our services to meet your needs.

