

# Prize Wordsearch

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

## Can you find 10 musical instruments?

If so, send your completed entry, along with your name and address to:

**Prize Wordsearch,**  
 Basted House,  
 Harrison Road,  
 Borough Green,  
 Sevenoaks,  
 Kent TN15 8PB

**By Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2009**  
 The winner, drawn from all correct entries, will win £50.

Name: .....

Address: .....

**This competition is not open to Russet Homes or Circle Anglia employees, Board members or their relatives.**

**Last wordsearch answers:** HONDA FIAT RENAULT CHRYSLER FORD HYUNDAI VOLVO MERCEDES SAAB CITROEN

## Feedback

Why not write to Feedback with any news and views you have that might interest our readers?

## Surfing?

Why not visit our website at: [www.russethomes.org](http://www.russethomes.org) for more information, news and articles of general interest.

## Help with this newsletter

This newsletter is available in translation, Braille, large print and audio tape versions. Please ring: **01732 780999** to request a copy.



**Wordsearch Winner**  
 Michael Jacobs of Aylesford won the £50 cheque as winner of our previous Wordsearch competition.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## Request for Translated Information

If English is not your first language and you need assistance, please tick the appropriate box and send to the address below with your name and address.

Name: .....

Address: .....

ইংরেজী যদি আপনার প্রথম ভাষা না হয় এবং আপনার সাহায্যের প্রয়োজন, তাহলে দয়াকরে সঠিক ঘরে টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং আপনার নাম ও ঠিকানা সহ নীচের ঠিকানায় পাঠিয়ে দিন।

BENGALI

اگر انگریزی آپ کی صدر زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو مدد حاصل کرنے کی ضرورت ہے تو براہ کرم موزوں خانے پر ٹیک لگائیے اور اپنے نام اور پتے کے ساتھ اسے بچے دینے کے لیے پتہ پر واپس بھیج دیجئے۔

URDU

假如英語並非你的第一語，而你需要別人幫助，請在適當的方格內作勾記，並在寫上你的姓名及地址後寄往下列地址。

CHINESE

# Russet News

The news magazine for Russet Homes residents



# Safe as Houses

**Eight year old Olivia Forbes from East Malling put her knowledge on home safety to the test during a competition, Safe as Houses, and is now the proud owner of a beautiful new dolls house.**

Local residents took part in the competition organised by our

community involvement team during a Community Safety Day held at St James the Great School in East Malling. Potential safety hazards were deliberately set up and placed within the rooms of a large dolls house and local people of all ages were asked to spot the dangers. Many identified potential hazards such as shoes left on the stairs, a child alone in the bath, an iron on the ironing board, bottles of chemicals lying

around the bathroom/kitchen and many more.

Marilyn Smith, Russet Homes Community Investment Manager, said: "Every person who took part had the opportunity to enter a draw to win the dolls house and Olivia came up trumps. The competition proved to be really popular and a fun way to get an important message about safety across."

**Don't forget our Freephone Repair Helpline on: 0800 197 2880**





## MP visits

Staff welcomed Sir John Stanley, MP for Tonbridge and Malling on a visit recently, and enjoyed the opportunity to explain how they were working hard to provide great homes and reliable services.

One department, Contact Russet, demonstrated how they offer tenants a 24 hour freephone repair line, making it easier to report a repair anytime night or day. Recognising that in today's busy world many people just don't get the chance to make 'phone calls during office hours Contact Russet was set up to give a speedier, better and more accessible service.

Sir John sent a letter of thanks after his visit which included favourable comments about our staff. In particular he commented upon how they 'respond to his letters in commendable detail and with high professional standards'.



## Volunteer Centre set to expand

**People who struggle to get out and about in Tonbridge can continue to take advantage of the Volunteer Centre's very popular Shopping Companions scheme thanks to further funding from Russet Homes.**

Volunteer drivers pick up people who have mobility problems and accompany them around the supermarket. The scheme has been running since June 2006 making around 70 regular shopping visits each month, over half of which are for residents of Russet Homes.

Our funding also means the Volunteer Centre will be able to expand its services into Snodland for the first time. A new drop in centre opened at the Wolfe Centre at Holmesdale School at the beginning of June.

It hopes to attract more volunteers who can lend a hand to local groups and organisations. The centre will offer advice on volunteering opportunities and help put volunteers in touch with the groups.

**If you would like to volunteer ring Barbara Williams on 01732 357978**



## You have a say in setting new standards

A brand new set of standards for all social landlords is being drawn up by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and we asked you to get involved and have a say in the way your home is managed.

The TSA is the new regulator for homes owned by housing associations and co-ops. First and foremost they plan to stand up for the interest of tenants and put their needs first. The standards are very important, as the TSA will be monitoring how landlords do in achieving them - and taking action against any who don't.

Many of you accepted our invitation to come along for a coffee and to complete a questionnaire prepared by the TSA asking questions such as what is the most important to you - repairs and maintenance (when carried out, choice of contractor, option to do it yourself), design of home (colour scheme, choice of kitchen etc) cleanliness of communal areas etc.

Once all the feedback is collected the TSA will let you know what everyone said and what they think needs doing to make sure future standards fit with what tenants want.

## Consumer Panel

We have over 300 residents on our consumer panel and every time they complete a survey they receive a £10 voucher as a thank you. If you would you like to be on the panel contact Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716 for an application form.

You said... **We did!**

### Results of the last survey:

- **Estate Inspections:** 98% thought they were necessary and 50% had noticed improvements on their estates. We are reviewing estate inspections based on suggestions made.
- **Resident Involvement:** 86% thought our Resident Involvement Statement was good value for money and 89% thought that we offered enough ways for residents to become involved.

- **Satisfaction with Services:**
- **Aspirations:** we asked what hopes people had for their area, themselves and their families. Improved parking and more litter bins topped the list for their area and we shall be taking these up with the local authorities.

### Satisfied:

Repairs and Maintenance	81%
Looking after the neighbourhood	64%
Answering phones	94%
Answering letters and e-mails	79%
Helpfulness of staff	93%
Keeping you informed	91%
Collecting rent	91%
Access to our offices	93%

For families the provision of safe play areas and lowering speed limits on estate roads were the priorities. As a result we will be reviewing our play areas in consultation with residents and children and will forward residents' concerns over speed limits to the relevant agencies.

**Full results can be seen on our website [www.russethomes.org](http://www.russethomes.org)**

# FORUM FOCUS

# FORUM



**FORUM Meeting** The next FORUM meeting is on Tuesday 11 August and the Annual General Meeting of FORUM is on Tuesday 13 October. Meetings are held at Basted House and start at 7pm. If you wish to attend a meeting please contact Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716.



## Good Neighbour winners

**Our Good Neighbour awards say "thank you" to people who have made a real difference to their community and/or neighbours' lives.**

There were two winners this spring. Mr & Mrs Hollman were nominated by Mrs Sylvester of Ightham, who said: "They are the most wonderful people and an asset to our community, everyone in the road knows Ron and Jean and what a wonderful kind-hearted couple they are".

Mrs Bainbridge was nominated by Mrs Ruck of Tonbridge. Mrs Bainbridge showed

Mrs Ruck a lot of kindness when she and her husband were seriously ill, and continues to do so. They have been friends and neighbours for almost 40 years.

Please keep your nominations coming in! Contact Melanie McAdam, Resident Involvement Officer, 01732 780999 for details and a form.

## Meet your local FORUM member

If you would like to contact your local member please ring **Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716**

The last Consumer Panel results told us that residents did not know their local FORUM member, so here they are:

### You said... We did!

#### Kent Tenants' Conference

The South East Kent Tenant Participation Forum together with the Kent and Sussex Resident Involvement Alliance has organised a conference on sharing best practice in resident involvement.

The conference is on 30 September in Ashford and speakers include the Chair of Derby Homes, the Managing Director of West Kent Extra and a speaker from the Tenant Services Authority. There will be lots of tenants sharing their involvement experiences.

We have booked five places and if you would like to come, please contact Melanie McAdam on the number below.

**Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716**

#### Residents' Associations

The Consumer Panel told us they wanted more information on Resident Associations. Here are two active associations, but if you would like to start one in your area please contact Melanie McAdam on the number below.

**Higham Residents' Association in North Tonbridge:** The next meeting is on 15 September at Penruddocke House, The Ridgeway at 7.30pm. Contact Peter Reed (Chair) for details on 01732 355411.

**Longmead Residents' Association in North Tonbridge:** The next meeting is on 28 July at Frome Court, Longmead Way at 7pm. Residents from Trench are welcome to attend as it will soon become the association for both areas. **Contact Pat Hill (Chair) on 01732 357570.**



**John Figgitt**  
Chair of FORUM  
St Stephens area



**Kath Parry**  
Vice Chair of FORUM  
Winterfield area



**Jon Spencer**  
Treasurer of FORUM  
Airfield area



**David Metcalf**  
Secretary of FORUM,  
Sheltered Schemes



**Sheila Twort**  
Higham area



**Sylvia Beevis**  
Hildenborough area



**Pat Hill**  
Longmead area



**Betty Osborne**  
Trench area



**Robert Fage**  
Tonbridge Wells and  
outlying areas



**Margaret Barrow**  
Wrotham area



**Evelyn Beal**  
Sheltered Schemes



**Alison Dennis**  
Leaseholder representative

## Choice based lettings

Our new system for letting homes - based on giving people a greater say and choice in where they live - has had its first month of activity. And pretty successful it has been too. During the month we advertised 23 properties and received 322 bids on 18 of the properties.

We are currently holding vacancies at five sheltered bedsits so if anyone is interested in one of these then please get in touch. Either visit the Homechoice website [www.kenthomechoice.org.uk](http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk) or contact your housing officer.

## Update on Charitable Status

We reported last October on the support we had received for our proposal to convert Russet Homes to a charity – over 94% of those taking part in the consultation felt that this was a good idea.

Although it took some time to get agreement from HM Revenue & Customs and the Tenant Services Authority (formerly the Housing

Corporation), our application was finally approved and Russet Homes became a charitable housing association on 1st April 2009.

This will have no direct affect on services, but it puts us in step with most other housing associations and will have benefits in respect of tax liability and opportunities for funding in the future.

## Making a real difference

Since January 2009 our Welfare Benefits Advisor has successfully claimed over £59,000 worth of backdated Housing Benefit on behalf of tenants and helped residents to claim other benefits to which they were entitled.



Contact Lee Spring on 01732 780999 ext 2706 if you want any advice on welfare benefits.

## Evictions

Evictions are a last resort but sometimes they can't be avoided. If you have problems paying your rent, contact your Income Recovery Officer

straight away as we can usually help. You might be entitled to some benefits and our Welfare Benefits Advisor, Lee Spring, or the Council can help with this. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council can be contacted on 01732 844522

and Maidstone Borough Council on 01622 602000. If you or your family are causing nuisance or anti-social behaviour then you need to stop so that we don't have to take court action against you.

EVICTON DATE	WHO	WHY
February 2009	Couple and 5 children, East Malling Single man, Tonbridge Single man, Tonbridge	Anti-Social behaviour Rent arrears Rent arrears
April 2009	Single man, Tonbridge Single woman, Burham	Rent arrears Rent arrears

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

# Performance update

January to March 2009

In each issue we give you information on our performance.

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

### Collecting rent

For every pound in rent due to us, we collected 100.2 pence.



### Empty homes

Our target is to relet empty homes within 25 days. During this period, the average time to relet empty homes was 29 days. This was a marked improvement on last quarter but work continues to reduce this further



### Gas servicing

We aim to have a valid Gas Safety Certificate for every home. We have them for 99.6% of our homes. Your safety is of primary importance to us and we aim to ensure all properties that require annual servicing visit have this done but we rely on your co-operation to be able to do so.



### Home repairs

In 95.4% of cases, you told us that the appointment made for home repairs was kept. Our target is 95%. We aim to complete 98% of emergency repairs on time. During this period you told us 98.5% were on time.



### Customer contact

Our target is to answer all correspondence within 7 working days. We managed to achieve this 99.5 times out of 100. We aim to answer all telephone calls within 5 rings (or 10 seconds). We achieved this 83 times out of 100 although 97% were answered within 30 seconds.



## Anti-social behaviour eviction

We would like to thank local residents in East Malling who have taken a stand against anti-social behaviour and have assisted Russet Homes during a long Court case to end the tenancy of a family in East Malling, who have subjected their neighbours to persistent anti-social behaviour.

In November 2008, an order was awarded following a week long Court hearing against a family who had subjected their neighbours to anti-social behaviour over an extensive period of time. In February 2009 this

family were evicted. This shows that Russet Homes will not accept anti-social behaviour and will take action against the perpetrators.

If a Community Compliance Officer contacts you as your behaviour is causing anti-social behaviour, please think about your actions and the impact these have upon your neighbours and the community. We will work with perpetrators to understand, and change the behaviour, but if it continues we will take action and you could lose your home.

## Goodbye to Corgi



The Gas Safe Register replaced the CORGI gas register in Great Britain on 1 April 2009. Anyone you ask to carry out work on gas in your home must be registered with the Gas Safe Register.

If not, they are breaking the law and putting you and your family at risk. All the contractors we use are Gas Safe registered.

If you are organising work your self you must use a Gas Safe registered engineer. You can find them by calling 0800 408 5500. Please remember you will also need our permission before making any alterations to your property.

Before any gas work is carried out, always make sure you ask to see a Gas Safe Register ID card which every engineer carries.

## Healthy Living event

We would like to invite all residents to a Healthy Living event on 22 July 2009 from 1pm to 4pm at Basted House.

There will be the chance to win a **Wii Fit** and other prizes just by coming along. Other attractions will include:

- Community Chef giving cookery displays on seasonal menus for under £5

- 'Your favourite recipe' competition (bring these with you)
- Dancing and healthy living displays in arena
- Mini Olympics
- Energy saving trust car simulator
- Skip2Bfit demonstrations
- Dance mats
- Fruit tasting
- Lots of stalls with healthy living in mind

- Lots of freebies and fun including tea, coffee and soft drinks
- Teddy bear picnic

There will also be a picnic area and free parking.

We will also be organising coaches to the event - see enclosed leaflet. Please ring **Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716 to book your seat on a coach, or if you have any special travel requirements.**

## HOMEOWNER NEWS



### Getting into home ownership

Newbuild Homebuy (formerly Shared Ownership) is an excellent scheme to help people get a foot on the housing ladder in an affordable way.

A mortgage is paid on a 25% share with a lower deposit and no stamp duty needed. A subsidised rent is paid to Russet Homes on the remaining amount of equity and a service charge is levied to include communal costs and buildings insurance. This scheme is available to all first time buyers and those who do not own a property.

If you are interested, please register with Moat Housing ([www.homebuy.co.uk](http://www.homebuy.co.uk)) and contact the Circle Anglia Sales and Marketing Team on 0845 304 1007.



### Open evening

Our Homeowner Open Evening is 14 July from 6.30 to 8pm at Basted House - all homeowners welcome.

Come along to meet other leaseholders and shared owners as well as our staff.

We are also keen to hear what issues interest or concern you and to answer any questions you may have about our service.

Please contact Sarah Chatfield on 01732 781943 if you would like to come.

### Current homes available...

#### KINGS HILL - WEST MALLING

Two bedroom houses available from August 2009. Fantastic two storey houses with double bedrooms, separate fitted kitchen, lounge with patio doors leading on to private garden. Double glazing, gas central heating with allocated parking. Prices to be confirmed, 25% minimum share, 2% rent charge with service charge approx £20 per month. Must live/work in Tonbridge & Malling.

#### MOUNT NOD APARTMENTS - GREENHITHE

25 one and two bedroom apartments due for completion in August 2009. Excellent location along London Road, 5 mins from Bluewater with views over the Thames estuary.

Mount Nod is set over three floors offering fully fitted kitchens, en-suite bathrooms (two beds only) with ground floor apartments having private patios. Prices to be confirmed, 25% minimum share.

#### GREENFIELDS - MAIDSTONE

20 two and three bedroom houses close to Mote Park in Maidstone due in January 2010. Properties have fantastic specifications including: modern fitted kitchen, tiled three piece bathrooms and en-suites, private gardens and allocated parking.

For more information visit [www.circleanglia-yourhome.org](http://www.circleanglia-yourhome.org) or ring 0845 304 1007 and speak to Alex Rivers, Sales and Marketing Officer.

# Taking fire safety seriously

**We make sure all our homes and communal areas have mains wired smoke alarms fitted as standard.**

Over 5000 of our properties now have them with the remaining installations being completed over the course of the current year. If you don't have one yet, contact us and we

can let you know when the work is due to be done.

They need to be regularly checked to ensure they work effectively. We will be doing this as part of the annual gas safety check. If you don't have gas, we will make separate arrangements for having this done. If you still have battery

alarms, keep them free from dust and test them once a week. Change the batteries in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Unless they are of the 10-year type, this should be at least every year. Contact us if you decide to change to mains wired alarms.

## Fire it can kill

Last year there were 35,000 fire incidents in the home around the country. With a few simple precautions though, you can make sure the risk of a fire in your home is virtually nil:

To help prevent electrical fires:

- unplug appliances that aren't in use
- never overload adaptors with too many plugs
- have electrical appliances regularly tested by an approved contractor.

### Be careful with heaters, candles and smoking

- keep heaters at a safe distance from flammable materials and always unplug electrical heaters when not in use
- never cover heaters, for example by draping washing over them

- never leave burning candles unattended
- never leave matches where children may find them
- be careful with lighted cigarettes - never smoke in bed. Stub cigarette ends right out
- never empty a hot ashtray into the bin - wet the contents first or wait until it's completely cold.

### Kitchen safety

- avoid leaving children in the kitchen alone when cooking on the hob - keep matches and saucepan handles well out of their reach
- take care when cooking with hot oil
- don't use cooking appliances to heat your kitchen.

### Bedtime safety

Make a check of your home before you go to bed - you are more at risk from a fire when asleep. Close inside doors at night to help prevent a fire from spreading.

### Know your escape route

Think about what you would do if there was a fire in your home and have an escape plan you and everyone at home are familiar with. Be careful to keep possible escape routes clear. In particular don't lock windows that are suitable to escape from while you are at home and if your front or back door can be locked with a key from the inside, make sure it is easily accessible to everyone in your house.

# New rules on gas cookers

**Changes in gas safety regulations require an air gap of 20 millimetres either side of gas cookers, between the outer casing of the cooker and the side panel of the kitchen units.**



Gas cookers may no longer be installed tightly between kitchen units and it is therefore advisable that you check that there will be a 20 millimetre air gap either side of any new gas cooker you buy because the installer will not fit your new cooker if there is not the required air space either side.

The new regulations are not retrospective and therefore you are not required to alter your kitchen if your current gas cooker does not have the 20 millimetre gap either side.

These regulations do not apply to electric cookers. All new kitchen installations we have done since 2006 have been designed to meet the current regulation and allow for a cooker space of 640 millimetres even where the existing cooker has been electric. Standard four burner cookers are 600 millimetres wide but if you want to buy a larger gas cooker, it is likely that you will need to make alterations to your kitchen design after getting our consent.

Plan what to do if there was an emergency in your home:

- get everyone out
- stay out
- dial 999 immediately - it's free from any phone and can be dialled from a mobile even if you have no credit.

### Find out more:

<http://campaigns.direct.gov.uk/firekills/index.html> or contact Kent Fire and Rescue Service who may be able to provide a free home fire safety check.

### Useful numbers:

**Kent Fire and Rescue Service**  
01622 692121  
**Home fire safety checks**  
0800 923 7000



# Training for life

We are sponsoring lots of training opportunities to help residents gain new skills that will enhance their life chances.

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**

We are sponsoring the YWCA in Tonbridge to run the following opportunities:

**Cooking programme:** A 6 week (20 hours) course covering alternatives to takeaways using seasonal foods, healthy family diets and balanced meals and understanding food as an enjoyable part of family life.

**Basic skills programme:** After an initial assessment an individual learning programme will be drawn up to enable you to improve basic maths and English and gain qualifications.

**IT volunteering project:** A five week course helping young women to train as volunteers to assist residents in sheltered schemes to learn basic IT skills using laptops.

Course includes: IT skills and troubleshooting / internet use / using e-mail / using digital photography / communication skills / volunteering / understanding older people and those from different backgrounds.

**Tenancy training programme:** An 8 week programme of three hours per week covering: finding a home / moving in / landlord and tenancy issues / money management / home maintenance / good neighbours and neighbourhoods / your community. This course will help you to be a good tenant and may enhance your chances of finding your first home.

Other courses include:

- Food Safety (Level 2 Award in Food Safety in Catering)
- First Aid courses which are provided by St John Ambulance.



These courses run throughout the year on various dates and at various venues.



Russet Homes has teamed up with Kent Adult Education to help residents take up a new fitness regime, learn a new skill, get a qualification or simply have fun.

Russet Homes is offering residents the opportunity to learn for just half the price. We will pay 50% of the cost up to £100 - conditions apply so please ask.

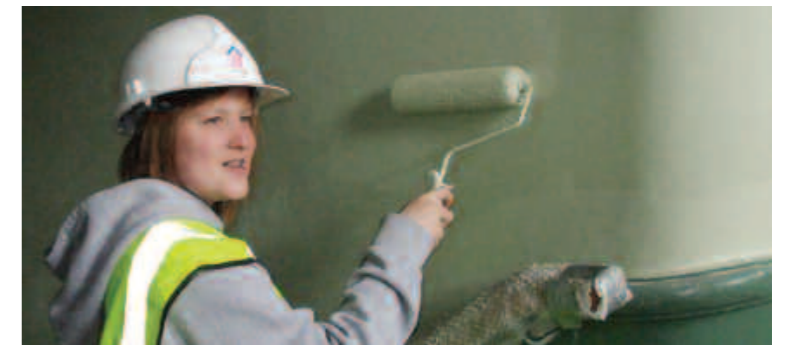
Simply call Melanie McAdam at Russet Homes on: 01732 780999 to discuss your course and receive a letter to take to your local Kent Adult Education Centre (AEC).

## Russet Homes DIY workshop

Are you interested in finding out more about looking after your home?

This introductory basic DIY workshop will cover:

- Health and safety
- Common issues in the home
- Basic painting and decorating
- Basic tiling
- Changing a washer
- Basic electrical awareness.



Georgia Bradford (pictured) is studying the Diploma in Construction, whilst working with Lakehouse. She completed a placement in the office, followed by a placement with a site manager and ended up

with a decorating placement on site. She says: 'I enjoyed the variety of tasks I completed. Most females do not consider construction as a career - ignore the stereotypes and give it a go!'



We are pleased to offer residents the opportunity to apply for a construction awareness opportunity with Lakehouse.

## Working in construction

Lakehouse is our home improvement contractor refurbishing kitchens and bathrooms.

The programme will involve:

- Health & Safety training leading to CSCS test

- Work experience in construction
- Training
- Advice on CV's and finding work.

This could lead to a job in construction.

## Customer service workshop

Come along to our one hour Customer Services Awareness workshops which cover:

- Basic customer services
- Handling complaints
- Careers in customer services
- Support with your CV

There is also the opportunity to apply for a work experience placement with Lakehouse.

Please contact Marilyn Smith on 01732 780999 ext 4811 to register your interest in any of the courses shown.

## Looking for work?

Get support with the following:

- Careers
- Job searching
- Writing CVs and covering letters
- Completing application forms
- Preparing for interviews
- Work placements
- Signposting to specialist training providers and recruitment agencies.

## Service Excellence Awards

The Service Excellence Awards Scheme continues to go from strength to strength, recognising outstanding service from members of staff of Russet Homes. We are pleased to announce the following monthly award winners for February, March and April 2009:

### February 2009

Glenn Wood, Groundskeeper/Caretaker

### March 2009

Michelle Turner, Building Services Administrator

### April 2009

Lee Spring, Welfare Benefits Advisor



Glenn Wood



Michelle Turner



Lee Spring

These award winners will be put forward along with the other monthly winners as candidates for the Employee of the Year, to be announced later in the year. Each award winner has demonstrated a real commitment to service excellence and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

## Census 2009

We will soon be doing a census of all our households. The census enables us to collect up to date information about our customers needs so we can plan and develop services that are appropriate.

As in previous years we will ask a series of questions about you and your household – the information will be treated in the strictest confidence and is for internal use only.

We will send out the census forms in the Autumn and we hope you will be able to spend a few moments completing and returning the form in the reply paid envelope provided. As in past years we are hoping to organise a prize draw as a thank you but you'll have to 'return it to win it'!

## Receipt winners

### Repairs Winners

#### Jan-09

Mr & Mrs Watson  
Town Acres, Tonbridge

#### Feb-09

Mrs M J Wilson  
Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge

#### Mar-09

Mrs V Down  
Plover Road, Larkfield

### Gas Winners

#### Jan-09

Mrs A Mitchell  
Chapel Close, Ryarsh, West Malling,

#### Feb-09

Mr M Francis  
Blatchford Close, East Malling

#### Mar-09

Mrs J Head  
Stratford Road, West Malling



In response to the widespread flooding problems in recent years, the permitted development rights that allow householders to pave their front garden for hardstanding without planning permission have changed.

From October 1st 2008, planning permission has been required for the installation of hardstand areas unless they are constructed of a permeable material which allows rainwater to permeate through the surface and drain away naturally. The cost of meeting the new requirements is about 20% higher than before.

There are several types of material which satisfy these requirements and a presentation of these was given at a meeting of our Tenant Repairs User Group in February 2009 where the members chose what they thought was aesthetically pleasing, hard wearing and the most maintenance free for our residents.

## New contractor appointed

From the beginning of July 2009 the contractor responsible for response maintenance and void works will be Mears.

The five year contract - which could last as long as 10 years subject to satisfactory performance - was recently retendered and Mears were the winning bidder. We say goodbye to Osbornes; together we have achieved significant improvements in service levels for customers, particularly in overall levels of satisfaction and more reliability in how appointments are organised.

Mears is the leading social housing repairs and maintenance provider in the UK employing more than 3,000 staff and carrying out 3,000 repairs each day to 500,000 homes nationwide. Being big brings benefits of economies of scale and tried and tested experience of working in communities as diverse as inner city estates and remote rural villages. They are successful though in combining this with a strong local focus – the intention is to operate from premises locally with a dedicated team.

Mears has an excellent reputation for customer care and involving residents in decision making. Our portfolio holder for asset management and members of our Tenant Repairs User Group have been closely involved in the tendering and contractor selection processes and will be similarly influential in the important period ahead as the new service takes shape.

Every household will be receiving a leaflet introducing Mears and details of how to report repairs. The Freephone number remains as before – 0800 1972880.

**MEARS**