



News for tenants and leaseholders

inside this issue...

## Understanding More About Our Housing

We are going to be carrying out a stock condition survey of the housing. The purpose of the survey is to gather condition information which will inform future investment programmes. We have appointed Michael Dyson Associates Limited as the consultant who has a number of surveyors carrying out the surveys.

*“Our target is to complete a survey of 60% of the housing stock, 100% of flat blocks, communal areas and garage sites.”*

The property you live in could be one of the target properties to survey, if so we would appreciate your co-operation in allowing the surveyors into your property. If your property is a target property you will receive a notification letter which will provide details of the survey time and date. Should the appointment not be convenient there will be a Freephone number, email address and QR barcode to contact Michael Dyson Associates Limited to arrange a more convenient time and date. They will be in your property up to 40 minutes depending on the size and complexity of your property.

Surveyors will be carrying identification badges and letters of authorisation, please ask to see them.

The surveys commenced at the beginning of February and will be completed by mid-June 2017.

**We thank you for your co-operation.**

If you would like more information please call Freephone 0800 328 9896 or Local Rate - 01484 668724 or email: [ecc@mdyson.co.uk](mailto:ecc@mdyson.co.uk)

PAGE 4 - TAX-FREE  
CHILDCARE



PAGE 6 - RECYCLING  
SPECIAL



PAGE 8 - GOLDEN-OLDIES  
IN EXETER



# THE PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PARTNERSHIP IN 2016



## PSP attends The Residents' Network Annual Conference

In December the PSP attended the Residents' Network Annual Conference 2016 in London, and returned having had an insightful and thought provoking day. The conference outlined the effects of changing regulation and the challenges social housing providers, local authorities in particular, are facing. It also reviewed the likely implications of welfare reforms on many households, and subsequent effects upon housing providers.

Lord Kerslake and Lord Best presented their views on the 2016 Housing and Planning Act, sharing insights about the way the Act came to pass. They called for real tenant stories to be used to influence and support future change in housing policy, and expressed a requirement for all kinds of housing to be developed if issues are to really be addressed.

During workshops in the afternoon the group learnt about ways others are approaching digital engagement, changes to data protection, and domestic violence. The key message from the latter reinforced that domestic violence and safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Housing officers and contractors have a unique insight as they regularly visit tenant's homes, and the PSP returned reminding us of the key role we have to play. We were pleased to report to the PSP that all members of Landlord Services undergo safeguarding training and carry a safeguarding reference card to make sure we know who to notify if we notice things that generate concern. We are also working with our contractors to raise safeguarding awareness and deliver appropriate training.



If you want to meet new people, work as a team or build your confidence please call Jenny Barnett to discuss joining the PSP on 01392 265815 or email: [residentinvolvement@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@exeter.gov.uk)



## TERRY TALKS

### Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour that can blight a neighbourhood does not change. Loud music, shouting, arguing, illegal drug use, all may feature.

#### What has changed is the way in which your Council tackles it?

A new policy on dealing with anti-social behaviour has been adopted, along with new guidance for the housing officers.

The aim, as always, is to take the right action at the right time.

Your housing officers already work hard to respond to your concerns but the policy and guidance has been stripped back to make it clearer and to be more effective.

One key change is to ensure that we know more about the complainant. A vulnerability risk assessment will be carried out at the first contact with the complainant. This will influence how we respond.

The legal powers to deal with anti-social behaviour are unchanged. They will be used and are used when necessary. But housing officers will work to bring about change without using them if possible. If not then I will be spending more time at court.



## Meet Jason Ham your new Housing Complaints Co-ordinator

My name is Jason Ham, I have recently been appointed to the new post of Housing Complaints Co-ordinator within Landlord Services.

This is my first time working in Housing which I am really enjoying. I am looking at ways to best deliver an effective complaints process within the department.

I hope that during your tenancy you will not have to make a complaint, but if you do need to complain you can let us know via email, telephone, online or in writing. You can expect a response or update to your complaint within 15 working days, and it will be taken seriously.

***“Where we do fall short of what you might expect from us, we take time to understand the issues raised, to speedily seek a resolution, and to learn from complaints. We are committed to delivering excellent customer service and use complaints to identify ways in which the service can be changed to avoid repeating the same issues.”***

It's my role to make the complaints process runs smoothly and ensure problems are not simply responded to but are resolved. I also closely monitor complaints to identify potential changes that can be made to the service and ways to improve performance.

While I hope that you will not have to make a complaint, rest reassured that if you do, we will take time to listen and react.

**You can contact Jason on on 01392 265376  
or email: [jason.ham@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:jason.ham@exeter.gov.uk)  
or [housing.complaints@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:housing.complaints@exeter.gov.uk)**



## Obituary Lawrence (Baz) Pendleton

In November we bid a very sad farewell to handyman, Baz, who passed away unexpectedly. This came as a great shock to everyone in the Exeter Branch of Mears and Exeter City Council officers, wardens and the many residents that Baz provided such a wonderful service for. Our sincere and deepest sympathy goes out to Mrs Pendleton and the family at this very sad and difficult time.

Baz was always cheery and approachable, with nothing ever being too much trouble and he always went that extra mile. He provided a handyman service to Exeter City Council's Older Persons' Accommodation and all requests were met with an "okey dokey" and a near magic instant appearance to fix whatever the issue was. He was one in a million with the enthusiasm, care and kindness he would show tenants. With his brilliant sense of humour and ability to always see the funny side, it's no wonder one of his many sayings was "Happy Days"!

During his military career with the Welsh Guards, Baz was responsible for arranging and composing much of the music played by the band. On the day of Baz's funeral, the Welsh Guards provided the musical support for the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and, as a tribute, much of 'his' music was played by his former band on that day.

"I can only speak highly of Baz; he was such a kind, considerate and helpful individual who has provided an excellent service as the dedicated Handyperson," said Philip Taverner, Mears, General Manager, Devon and Cornwall.

A coffee morning was held in memory of Baz on Thursday 15 December at Nelson Close Community Centre, of course the venue was full, as so many people got to know the popular Baz. He will be missed and remembered.

"I have a huge task ahead of me in attempting to find an adequate replacement; whoever takes over the role will be faced with a very difficult challenge in attempting to offer the high level service and commitment that Baz managed to achieve as second nature," added Philip.

## ECC STAFF AWARDS

We are very proud that Housing's very own Christine Davies won the Special Recognition Award at Exeter City Council's Staff Awards in November! Thank you for all your hard work Christine - here she is on the night.

Robbie Robertson will be familiar to any of you who have faced pest problems, as he's been the one to sort these out. Robbie was another winner taking home the Local Hero Award. Congratulations to Robbie - you're our hero!



# Are you eligible for new Tax-Free Childcare?

**Tax-Free Childcare is a new Government scheme being rolled out in 2017 to help working families with their childcare costs.**

## How does it work?

Parents will need to open an online account through the Government website - just like a bank account - which they then use to pay their registered childcare costs from

- For every £8 parents pay in to the account, the Government will add £2
- The total amount in the account can only be spent on childcare
- Parents can receive up to £2,000 in Government support per child, per year, or £4,000 for disabled children
- The top up will be added into the account on the same day, and the total amount will be available to pay for childcare.
- Parents will be able to track how much they've paid in and how much they've spent for each child
- Each child will have a unique reference number.

## Who is eligible?

Parents could be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare if they work more than 16 hours a week and

- Earn at least £115 per week but less than £100,000 per year
- Don't receive childcare vouchers, tax credits or Universal Credit
- Have children who are under 12, or under 17 for disabled children
- Each account will require eligibility validation every three months.

## When will it be available?

- Early 2017
- It will be rolled out gradually, with parents of the youngest children able to apply first
- Parents will be able to apply for all their children at the same time, as soon as their youngest child becomes eligible
- All parents who are eligible will be able to apply by the end of 2017.

## 15 Hours Free Childcare for 3 and 4 year olds

Every child aged 3 and 4 is eligible to access free early learning and childcare. This is known as an entitlement to Early Years Free Early Education. Any child is eligible for Free Early Education from the beginning of the funding period following their third birthday to the beginning of the funding period following their fifth birthday.

### The Department for Education sets the funding period dates as

- September Period - between 1 September and 31 December
- January Period - between 1 January and 31 March
- April Period - between 1 April and 31 August.

Once a child is of school age and attends a Local Authority school, the school then receives the child's free early education entitlement. Independent schools, however, are eligible to continue supplying free early education until the term following a child's fifth birthday.

All children of eligible age, regardless of whether they or their parents have British citizenship or passport restrictions, are entitled to claim free early education.

## 30 Hours Free Childcare Coming Soon for 3 & 4 year olds

All 3 & 4 year old children are currently entitled to 15 hours of free childcare & early learning.

From **September 2017**, children of some working parents will be entitled to an additional 570 hours per year, meaning that many families will be able to claim 1140 hours of free childcare if they can meet certain criteria.

If eligible for the 30 hours childcare, also known as the 'Extended Entitlement', the 1140 hours of free childcare can be taken across the year, either in term times only or 'stretched' across the year for example.

- Up to 30 hours per week across 38 weeks per year (term time offer)
- Up to 22 hours per week across 51 weeks of the year ('stretched offer'). The remaining 18 hours to be used over the year as required.

**To find out more about tax free childcare visit [www.tax-free-childcare.info](http://www.tax-free-childcare.info)**



# Let us know how our contractors are doing – the easy way!

We're always working with our contractors to provide a great service but sometimes you don't receive the level of service you should. And then there are those contractors who consistently provide a fantastic service which should be applauded.

To date, we've relied on feedback from the contractors themselves and from you, our customers, when you take the trouble to write, email or call to complain or compliment. This isn't always convenient for you and doesn't provide sufficient independent feedback for us to accurately gauge how well our contractors are actually performing.

## Leave your feedback online

So we have introduced a new online facility where you can leave feedback about the service you have received after one of our contractors has visited you. Simply go online and visit [www.exeter.gov.uk/housingsurvey](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/housingsurvey) where you will find a short survey to complete. It only takes a couple of minutes and most of the questions simply involve choosing from a selection of answers. There is also a link to the survey in Housing's homepage on the Council's website.

**What you tell us is confidential - we will not pass your details to a contractor (or anyone else for that matter) unless you want us to.**

All the feedback we receive will be analysed to build a picture of how well each contractor is doing. This will help our contractors to understand where they need to improve. For example, we might tell one of them that out of the last 36 jobs they carried out, their operatives arrived late 11% of the time. It will also provide recognition and encouragement where service is consistently good - which is the standard we expect from all our contractors.

**Ian Miles - Health, Safety and Compliance Lead (Housing)**

## Home Contents Insurance Protect Your Belongings

Remember Exeter City Council does NOT insure your furniture or belongings against fire, theft, vandalism, burst pipes and other household risks.

To protect yourself against these risks you need to take out your own insurance. Under a scheme we have arranged with Allianz Insurance PLC, it's easy for you to protect your belongings.

The Pay As You Go Home Contents Insurance Scheme is open to all council tenants and, once approved, you will receive a welcome letter advising you of the amount you need to pay and when your cover begins. The payment of your premium gets added to your rent account on a fortnightly basis. This is then paid along with your rent. It is important that your premiums are paid and kept up to date or you may not be covered.

If you are over the age of 60, the sums insured can be as low as £6,000 (cost £1.32 per fortnight) or £9,000 for anybody else (£1.98 per fortnight).

You should check each year that the insured sums are enough to cover your belongings in the event of a claim.

**Full details of the policy cover and an application form can be picked up from the main reception at the Civic Centre or sent on request by calling 01392 265030.**



## WHY NOT CHOOSE TO PAY YOUR RENT BY DIRECT DEBIT?

No more queuing, debit cards or rent swipe card.

### What is Direct Debit?

A direct debit gives Exeter City Council permission to take rent from your bank account in agreed amounts at agreed times. You will be given at least 10 working days' notice if any changes need to be made and you can cancel at any time. Advantages of paying by direct debit are:

**It's simple** - complete the form and we will send your details to your bank to set up.

**It's convenient** - choose to pay on either the 1st of the month or fortnightly.

**It's secure** - the Direct Debit Guarantee protects your payments.

**It's efficient** - and the money we save can be put back in to improving services.

**It's regular** - your rent is calculated into equal monthly or fortnightly payments.

**It's flexible** - payment plans can be agreed to recover arrears.

When we receive your form, we will take your bank details and set up your Direct Debit. We will send you a confirmation letter that includes a copy of the Direct Debit guarantee. We will also give you at least 10 working days' notice of how much will be debited from your bank account. Contact us now on 01392 265527 and arrange to pay your rent by direct debit.

# If you build it, they will recycle

Exeter introduced green bins 20 years ago. Look how young Denis looked then! He says he hasn't had any work done, but we have our suspicions.

In those days, the Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF) was a shed in the lorry yard. It had one conveyor, and when it broke down it took three people to change the elastic band. This was a problem, because there were only two workers on the line.

In 2000, Exeter City Council began construction of the current MRF. This state-of-the-art facility was fitted with state-of-the-art machinery and operated by twenty state-of-the-art workers. We are one of only a few councils in the country to own one.

The facility is not large, and the machinery is no longer the most high-tech, but it allows us to separate all the most valuable materials to sell on to reprocessors, thus ensuring we get the best value for Exeter. Since all the money recycling generates in Exeter (over £1 million per year) gets ploughed back into essential public services in the city – services that would otherwise have to be paid for by increasing public costs like Council Tax and parking - we want to ensure we make as much as possible.

Our MRF Manager is a shrewd businessman. He never sits down and wears sunglasses indoors, and these days he only has to utter a smooth 'Good morning' to a potential buyer for them to swoon and immediately offer him the best price.

The reason we don't take glass in the green bin is because it would get smashed in the trucks, which would contaminate the paper and potentially wreck our machinery in the plant. Good quality paper is worth a lot of money to Exeter; contaminated paper costs money to burn. Repairing belts and machinery costs even more.

Anyway, after we have creamed off the best materials to sell on ourselves for the benefit of our city (rubs hands together), we send the cheaper stuff to another, much larger MRF. They are a commercial enterprise with the facilities to process even the smallest bits, and they are able to separate and record what we send them. Although we don't sell this material to them, the weights all count towards our recycling rate, which determines how much money we get from the government for our recycling efforts. So you can see it's important to recycle everything you can.

Councils who use third-parties to collect and sort their recycling don't benefit from being able to sell the material directly to reprocessors. They will simply get a lesser price from whomever sorts it for them, because those companies will sell on the materials themselves. We get the best of both worlds, which is great for Exeter.

Join Denis the Dustcart on Twitter and Facebook!  
@DustcartDenis For all things recycling in Exeter, through the life and times of the city's most famous dustcart.

Download your new calendar from April 2017:  
[exeter.gov.uk/bincollections](http://exeter.gov.uk/bincollections)

**BALED RECYCLING  
SORTED IN  
OUR PLANT...**



Recycling helps fund Council services...

which helps keep Council Tax increases down.

LAST YEAR  
WE SORTED  
3.6 MILLION  
PLASTIC MILK BOTTLES  
IN OUR RECYCLING PLANT

THAT'S 200,000  
FOR EVERY PICKER  
ON THE LINE

If all the card we sorted in our plant last year was cereal boxes, there would have been 50 million of them and our pickers would have processed 2.78 million each.