



Issue 4 | December 2006

Our new bigger Estate Services Team

Gloucester City Homes has just doubled the size of its Estate Services Team to ensure the external appearance of all communal areas on our estates is kept to the highest standard.

The Estate Services Team will be carrying out cleaning, rubbish removal, environmental works such as pruning and strimming; garden maintenance for vulnerable customers, removal of graffiti and reporting abandoned vehicles.

City-wide communal areas including garage sites will be managed by a dedicated Estate Service Worker team specific to your area.

Gloucester City Homes' Chief Executive Ashley Green stated "Gloucester City Homes is committed to ensuring that estates throughout the city that require improvements are targeted in terms of environmental work, security and additional facilities for tenants.

We understand that the effectiveness of the Estate Services Team affects the quality of life on estates and residents' enjoyment of their home and neighbourhood. We have invested extra resources to demonstrate our commitment in this area."

Our new bigger Estate Services Team

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respect

Street Surgery

On 25 October we held a Street Surgery, in partnership with the local police, in the area surrounding Coney Hill Parade.

Our Anti-Social Behaviour Officer Nicky Watson commented about the success of the evening: "The response from the community was very positive. These surgeries give tenants and residents the opportunity to talk to police and housing representatives to make us aware of any issue affecting their quality of life". Look out for Nicky, your Neighbourhood Management Officer Nicki Summerell, Inspector Ajinkya and PC Horsman on 17 January 2007 from 6pm for your next surgery.

Children and young people

To help promote respect and to engage young people in what we do, our Anti-social Behaviour Team are currently setting up links with the Youth Service, Connexions, community groups such as Echoes Youth Club in Coney Hill, and the Neighbourhood Projects. We are committed to giving children and young people the opportunity to take part in positive activities, which help promote feelings of inclusion within their community.

Children and young people who take part in such activities show the positive impact that they can have within the community.



ASB action on our estates

Recent action to combat anti-social behaviour on our estates includes the imprisonment of a woman who was causing a nuisance to residents of a local sheltered housing scheme over a long period of time.



Is anti-social behaviour affecting your life?

We have recently reviewed and updated our policies on anti-social behaviour, hate crime and domestic abuse.

If you are suffering from any of the above please contact us and we will do all we can to help. We work with the Police, Neighbourhood Rangers, environmental health officers, voluntary agencies (such as Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Support & Advocacy Project or Gloucestershire Race Equality Council), children and young people's services, adult and community services, neighbourhood projects, and other social landlords to ensure that you can get all the help you need.

Call us on 0800 408 2000.

The residents had suffered threatening, intimidating and verbally abusive behaviour along with criminal damage to their property.

The imprisonment came after her failure to keep to previous court orders requiring her to stop causing a nuisance and demonstrates Gloucester City Homes' determination to deal with anti-social behaviour on its estates.

Actions taken so far this year by our Anti-social Behaviour Team include:

Anti-social Behaviour Contracts:	13
Anti-social Behaviour Orders	1
Closure Orders:	1
Injunctions:	1
Evictions:	1
Notice Seeking Possession or Notice to Quit	6
Cease and Desist Notices	1
Other actions	6

Domestic violence will not be tolerated

Gloucester City Homes is joining forces with Gloucestershire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the Domestic Violence Support and Advocacy Project to promote a zero tolerance of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence cuts across all boundaries of social group, class age, race, religion, sexuality, gender and lifestyle and we want to ensure that all victims are able to access the help that is available and have the confidence to come forward. One in 3 women will experience domestic violence at some time in their lives. In Britain a woman dies every 2 to 3 days at the hand of a partner or ex partner and we want to get the message out to all victims of domestic violence that it will not be condoned.

A fast track court is developing in the county to ensure that perpetrators will be swiftly brought to justice.

Gloucestershire Constabulary takes domestic violence very seriously and officers do not necessarily need a victim's statement to prosecute perpetrators. If the Police have reasonable grounds, they will arrest perpetrators immediately - they no longer need a statement from the victim to make an arrest. And if the perpetrator has left the scene, they will track them down and bring them to justice to account for their unacceptable behaviour.

It is a basic human right to live your life free from violence, fear and intimidation - particularly in your own home. Don't suffer in silence - help is available.

If you are suffering from domestic violence you can call our Anti-social Behaviour Team on 0800 408 2000 for advice.

Gloucester Domestic Violence and Support and Advocacy (GDVSAP) also provide help. Call their help line on 01452 500115 for independent support and advice 24 hours a day.

Domestic Violence also occurs in 2 in every 5 same sex relationships. Call GAY-GLOS on 01452 306800.

Please don't suffer in silence - pick up the phone and dial for help. In an emergency call the Police on 999.

New citywide cleaning service

Gloucester City Homes has appointed a new partner to provide cleaning services to communal areas of blocks of flats throughout the city.

The new service, which started at the beginning of this month will be provided by Integrated Cleaning Management Limited (ICM.)

Although blocks of flats in Westgate, Kingsholm, Matson and St Paul's Court have received a cleaning service for some years, tenants in other areas have been responsible for keeping communal areas clean themselves.

The new service is being introduced to remove inconsistencies in our cleaning services and to ensure that tenants across the city are all provided with the same standard of service.

ICM have already carried out preparatory work in some blocks to bring them up to the minimum standard.

If you are interested in getting involved with the monitoring of the new cleaning contract, please contact our Customer Services Team on 0800 408 2000.



Making it happen in your area

To make sure that we keep on top of the issues on the estates that need attention, our Executive Management Team have selected an area each to support or "Champion."

Executive Management Team members, including Chief Executive Ashley Green, are making regular tours of their areas along with the Neighbourhood Services Officers for the areas and other key staff.

Ashley commented: "You told us that you wanted staff to spend more time on the estates and we are doing just that. By getting out to all the areas regularly, we can target the problems as they occur and work together to get things done."



The tours have already resulted in a range of issues being identified including litter, graffiti, dumping of bulky items and overgrown communal areas; and action being taken to deal with these.

With regular inspections scheduled to check that the work has been done, we hope that you will soon notice the difference in your area.

Your new Tenant Handbook

We have just produced a brand new and completely updated version of the Tenants' Handbook. The new handbook contains a wide range of information about your tenancy and Gloucester City Homes' services.

You can insert your Repairs Handbook and also your Sheltered Housing Handbook (if you are a sheltered housing tenant) into your new handbook folder, so that you can keep all your key information about our services in one place.

Your copy of the handbook will be coming out in the post to you during December.



Repairs Handbook

Our new Repairs Handbook was sent out to all tenants earlier this year. Some tenants have told us that they have not received one. If you have not received your copy, please contact our Customer Services Team on 0800 408 2000.

Gloucester City Homes Board

Are you interested in being a Board Member but aren't sure if you have the skills? Or maybe you just want to find out more?

Then our **New Board Member Development Programme** has a number of events just for you!

As the first Board member elections next year draw nearer we are keen to encourage tenants or leaseholders who are thinking about being on our Board. Gloucester City Homes has five tenants and a leaseholder tenant on the Board of Directors. We are going to be holding elections every year for two of the tenant positions starting next spring. Elected Tenant Board members serve a three-year term before standing for re-election.

We are keen to encourage and develop individuals who are interested and want to learn more.

It's not too late to tell us how we should run the elections...

In the last edition we asked you how you think we should run the Tenant Board member elections. Thank you to those who responded. We would still like to hear from as many of you as possible so it's not too late to tell us your views. How much would you like to know about the candidates? Should there be a candidate for each estate or not? To let us know your views or to find out more about forthcoming events, phone Paul Masters on 0800 408 2000 or email governance@gloscityhomes.co.uk.

An extra reason to pay your rent!

There are already many good reasons for paying your rent on time but now there's a chance of an extra bonus for tenants who keep their accounts up to date!

Gloucester City Homes is introducing a new quarterly draw for tenants who don't go into arrears and the first draw is taking place this Christmas.

If your account is clear or in credit you will automatically qualify for the draw.

With a first prize of £500 cash and additional cash prizes to be won, it's worth checking your account and making sure you keep your payments up to date. Even a small amount of arrears will disqualify you from the draw.

Our first prize draw winners will be announced in January.



Don't fall into the arrears trap over Christmas

With all the pressures on the family budget over the festive season it's easy to end up spending more than you'd planned. It's important, however, to keep on top of priority bills such as your rent. Getting into rent arrears over Christmas could result in the misery of legal action in the New Year.

Here is some simple advice:

- ✓ Make sure all your priority bills are being paid, e.g. rent/mortgage, gas, electricity, council tax, and housekeeping.
- ✓ Draw up a personal budget to work out how much you have to pay out on all your essentials and make sure you have these covered.
- ✓ If you can decide how much you can afford to spend at Christmas in advance and stick to it, you are less likely to skip payments on essential bills which will need catching up with in the New Year.
- ✓ Try and spread payments for presents over as long a time as possible, so lump sums don't have to be paid all at once.
- ✓ Try to avoid expensive credit offers in shops, no matter how tempting they may seem.

For advice on rent arrears or benefits, contact our Income Management Team on 0800 408 2000 or visit our website at www.gloscityhomes.co.uk

Need advice about rent arrears or other debts?

Help will be at hand at Coney Hill in January, when Gloucester City Homes joins forces with other agencies for an Income Maximisation Day.

It will be your chance to talk to the people who can help with advice on benefits, dealing with debt and much more! Look out for further details!

Your area



Westgate Action Day

Gloucester City Homes Action Day Team moved to the Westgate area of the City on Friday 3 November to complete a makeover of the estate.

Following the success of its summer Action Days, Gloucester City Homes is carrying out a number of extra clean ups so that more areas can benefit from the programme and the Westgate estate was next on the list.

Activities on the day included a general clear up of the area, cutting back overgrown shrubs,

replacing communal washing lines and painting and planting shrubs and bedding plants ready to brighten the area during the winter months. Our thanks go to repairs partners Morrison and Action for Employment whose help on the day was invaluable.

Gloucester City Homes Chief Executive Ashley Green commented "Our Action Days have made a real difference for tenants over the year. The days are an excellent way of achieving immediate improvements for an area."

Our estate walkabouts and action days will kick off again next year with a new programme.



Walkabout dates for January

2007 are:

10 Jan Coney Hill

10 Jan Chequers

17 Jan Hucclecote

18 Jan Abbeydale and
Cathedral City

25 Jan Matson North

26 Jan Robinswood

Don't miss your chance to tell us what needs doing in your area! Contact our Customer Service Team on 0800 408 2000 for more information

Lunch clubs

Fancy a change from doing the cooking?
Come to a lunch club at one of our sheltered housing schemes.

Oliver Close, Tuffley, 1st Thursday of every month at 12 noon.

Broom House, Baneberry Road, Robinswood.
Every Friday at 12 noon.



Andrew's 30 year achievement

Kingsholm tenant Andrew Harley's 30-year contribution to resident involvement in the city has been recognised by the City Council and Gloucester City Homes in a special award ceremony.

Andrew was presented with a special certificate and travel vouchers, by the Right Worshipful The Mayor of Gloucester, Councillor Sue Blakeley at the City's Tenants' Forum in October.



Andrew was a founder member of the Kingsholm Residents Association, now a Tenant Consultative Committee, 30 years ago. He was also a founder member of the City's Tenants' Forum on which he served for many years. He was Chair of the Housing Options Appraisal Review Group, which led to the setting up of Gloucester City Homes and is a tenant member of Gloucester City Homes' Board of Directors.

Gloucester City Homes' Chief Executive, Ashley Green, said "I would like to congratulate Andrew on his achievement and thank him for his hard work and dedication over the years."

Councillor Andrew Gravells, Cabinet Member for Housing and Health added, "I have worked with Andrew for many years on issues that affect tenants, and whilst we may not have always seen eye-to-eye on everything, he has been a superb advocate for tenants and tenant involvement.

He's always made sure tenants' best interests are at the top of the agenda, and he's always kept councillors on their toes."

Carols and cakes

Broom House is also holding a Carols and Cakes event at 7.30pm on 20 December. The event is an informal carol service with Rosemary and David Sheldon and the Jigsaw Choir. Seasonal refreshments provided.

Residents at Clapham Court sheltered scheme have been busy filling Christmas shoeboxes to send to children at the Haven family centre. Pictured left are the residents with some of the boxes they have wrapped and filled.

Dates for your diary

Customer Forum

Please contact our Customer Services Team for 2007 meeting dates.

Leaseholders' Forum

Please contact our Customer Services Team for 2007 meeting dates.

Focus Group meetings

Thu 18th Jan Domestic violence

All focus group meetings are held at 5.30pm at the Gloucester City Homes office, Southgate House.

Tenant Group meetings

Barnwood Residents Association
2nd Tue of each month at 6pm at Coney Hill Neighbourhood College

Elmbridge & Longlevens Residents Association

Last Tue of every month at 6.30pm at the Old Richians Rugby Club.

Matson Tenants Association

1st Mon of each month at 6.00pm at One Stop Plus.

Kingsholm Tenant Consultative Committee

1st Tue of each month at 10.00am at Sherborne House meeting room

Podsmead

1st Wed of each month at 5.30pm at BadgerVale

Tredworth Residents Association

1st Tue of every month at Porky's Bar in the Golden Heart, Tredworth High Street.

TETRA

For information about meeting dates please contact Martin Horton on 01452 540927.

Westgate Tenant Consultative Committee

1st Tue of each month at Westgate community room

White City Residents Association

2nd Mon of each month, 7pm at White City Community Project, Starvaell Centre, Finlay Road.

Advice

Fly-tipping

Fly-tipping is the illegal dumping of rubbish or bulky items on land not licensed to receive it. It can be dangerous, pollutes land and waterways and costs the council tax payer significant amounts of money to clear away.

Dumping household, industrial and commercial waste illegally is a serious criminal offence that carries a fine of up to £20,000 or an offender can even be sent to prison.

Fly-tipping is often associated with dumping waste from vehicles. The person who owns the vehicle can also be prosecuted. This means a prosecution can be made when only the vehicle, not the driver, is identifiable. The police also have the powers to seize vehicles used for fly-tipping.

Gloucester City Council provides waste disposal sites and recycling centres where you can safely and legally dispose of unwanted items.

If you discover fly-tipped waste:

Do not:

- touch the waste - it may contain syringes, broken glass, asbestos, toxic chemicals or other hazardous substances
- disturb the site - there may be evidence that could help identify the fly-tippers and lead to their prosecution

Do:

- visually try to work out what the waste consists of and how much there is
- make a note of the day, date and time you saw the tipping, its exact location and whether it is in or near water

If you see someone fly-tipping make a note of:

- how many people are involved and what they look like
- what has been tipped - how much and what it looks like
- details of any vehicles involved including make, colour and registration number if possible

Report fly-tipping on your estate to Gloucester City Council.

If you see someone fly-tipping or to report fly-tipped waste, please contact the council by phoning 01452 396396

Graffiti removal

Graffiti costs the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds every year and creates an environment where crime and fear of crime thrive.

If you see any graffiti on your estate please report it to our Customer Services Team on 0800 408 2000. They will arrange for removal within 5 working days.

If the graffiti is racist or obscene we will aim to remove it within 24 hours.



Keep safe from bogus callers

You can't always be sure that people turning up on your doorstep are who they say they are. Most people who call at your home will be genuine. But sometimes, people turn up unannounced, with the intention of tricking their way into the home.

They are known as 'distraction burglars' or 'bogus callers', whose only aim is to get into homes to distract people and steal their money or valuables. You should always be alert when someone you don't know calls at your door.

Remember: bogus callers can be very convincing and persuasive.

You can reduce your chances of being a victim to bogus callers by doing the following:

- fit a door chain and / or viewer (special ones are available for people with sight loss);
- before opening the door, chain it and always lock the back door before answering the front door (some burglars try to get your attention at the front whilst their accomplice gains entry at the back);
- make a note of your customer number or repair number.

Ask your caller for this number to see if they know it, or for your special password if you have agreed one with the organisation the caller claims to represent;

- check the caller's identity, for example ask to see their ID card;
- if unsure either contact us or call the Bogus Callers Helpline 0808 1000 777;
- if you're still not sure, don't let them in. Tell them they will have to go away and get their organisation to make an appointment. If they're genuine - they won't mind;
- remember to take the chain off your door when you lock it again. Your family, friends or emergency services would not be able to get in easily if there is an emergency and you left the chain, when the door is locked!!

Energy efficiency and advice

Gloucester City Homes is now in partnership with The Severn Wye Energy Agency, who provide a range of services to residents on energy advice, including home visits (on request) to vulnerable residents and presentations to groups about energy efficiency. If you are having problems with your heating systems (other than those served by the District Heating system), with paying bills or with condensation, then please go to the Gloucestershire Efficiency Advice Centre. You will be given advice over the phone, sent fact sheets and offered an energy home visit.

Energy Efficiency free phone telephone number 0800 512 012

Avoiding Christmas Crime

It's a sad fact that Christmas is another opportunity for criminals to target our homes. With the extra value of presents being stored in the home in the run-up to Christmas and left on display during over the holiday period, it's a time of the year when household burglaries rise.

To avoid becoming the target of opportunist crime over Christmas:












- ✓ Keep presents out of sight until the last minute;
- ✓ Make sure large items stored in sheds, garages etc are secure and fit an alarm;

- ✓ Don't advertise what you have bought to criminals by leaving empty boxes outside your home;
- ✓ If you go out to visit family or friends, leave curtains drawn and a light on to make it look as though someone is at home - use timer switches or dusk-to-dawn light bulbs.

For good quality crime reduction products at a very low price contact Bearland Police Station, Longsmith Street, Gloucester: shed alarm £5, timer switches £3, dusk to dawn light bulbs £5.

our performance

We are continually working to improve our service to you. Here is a summary of our current performance in areas of our service that you have identified as being important to you.

Indicator	Performance 2005/6	Target for 2006/7	Current performance	How are we doing?
Providing a high quality repairs service (October figures)				
% of emergency repairs completed in target	96%	98.5%	94.0%	
% of urgent repairs completed in target	82%	98.74%	95%	
% of routine repairs completed in target	96%	96.65%	94%	
% appointments made and kept	-	96%	97.4%	
Average time taken to relet empty homes	48.7 days	23 days	42.25 days	
Increasing staff visibility on estates				
Number of homes visits completed	-	1426	2204	
Number of estate walkabouts	-	21	21	
Number of action days	-	9	12	
Dealing effectively with anti-social behaviour				
% of customers satisfied with the overall service	-	80	87%	
Customer service				
% calls answered	94.5%	95%	97.06%	
% complaints answered in target	87.84%	100%	86.1%	

We are focusing on areas where our performance is not meeting our targets to ensure that actions are put into place to deal with this.

For full information on all our performance information and to keep up-to-date with latest figures visit www.gloscityhomes.co.uk



Performance achieving target or above.



Performance within tolerance of target.



Performance below target with action plan in place to improve.

Your views make a difference

REACTION

We have a new system for feeding back comments to your suggestions - its called REACTION.

After you have told us your views in focus groups, customer satisfaction surveys, at Resident Association meetings, in complaints etc - we produce a report, to show you what we are doing in response.

Here is our response to some of your recent comments.

You said	Our Reply
Grounds maintenance	
The current grounds maintenance service is poor.	A new contractor will start work in February. We plan to work to a higher specification and blitz existing areas to raise standards.
Cleaning communal areas	
Window cleaning is poor in communal blocks.	A new city-wide cleaning contractor starts this month. We will vigorously enforce the standards.
Gas servicing	
Gas servicing is not planned well to suit people who are at work during the day	We now offer appointments for gas servicing on Saturday mornings for people who are out during normal working hours.
Being seen on the estates	
The Resident Involvement Team and other officers should be out more on the estates.	<p>We will continue to do regular walkabouts and action days to improve your neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Our Neighbourhood Services Officers aim to spend 80% of their time out on estates and visiting customers at home.</p> <p>Our Resident Involvement Team aims to attend all resident group meetings and visit all new tenants 28 days after they move in to discuss opportunities to get involved.</p> <p>We will have GCH coats and umbrellas, in addition to our current bags and ID cards to make us more noticeable when out on the estates.</p>

If you would like to be a block or street representative and help us to ensure standards of cleaning and grounds maintenance remain high, please contact us on 0800 408 2000.

To see the full reports, either contact us and we will send you a copy in the format of your choice or visit our resident involvement web pages at www.gloscityhomes.co.uk

