



95th anniversary mugs

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Changes to Benefits

Do you receive income support, job seekers allowance or employment and support allowance?

If you live in one of the following areas listed in this article then the way that you are paid your benefits will be changing. It will be paid into your bank account monthly and will include any housing benefit that you are entitled to. This means that you will be responsible for paying your own rent. Your housing benefit will no longer be paid directly to the Association.

“ This means that you will be responsible for paying your own rent. ”

If you live in Darlington, Durham, Doncaster, North Tyneside, Scarborough, Selby or Sunderland the changes will be made between September and November 2015.

If you live in East Riding, Hull, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Northumberland, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside or Stockton on Tees the changes will be made between December 2015 and April 2016.

Please contact us on free phone 0800 0287428 or mobile phone friendly 0300 1230734 if you would like any help or advice about paying your rent, opening a bank account, managing your benefits monthly or getting access to the internet.

Free phone: **0800 0287428**

Mobile friendly No: **0300 1230734**



Would you like to check your rent statement online, make a payment or report a repair?

Registering with My Home on our website will enable you to do this. Just click on the My Home icon at the top of the Association's home page – www.railwayha.co.uk – and follow the easy instructions. You will need to provide your name, date of birth, email address, a security question and answer.

We will then send you a letter by post containing your log in details.



Raising a mug

To mark our 95th anniversary we recently presented commemorative mugs to residents who turned 95 in 2014.

The limited edition bone china mugs were presented to 10 people who were born in the same year that Railway Housing Association was established, in 1919.

One of the residents receiving a mug was Sadie Reid, who lives in Auckland Avenue, Darlington. Mrs Reid celebrated her birthday on the 28th December, making her the last resident to turn 95 in 2014.

She said: “It was a lovely surprise when I discovered I was getting a mug.

“I know my family will tell me to use the mug but I think I will keep it as a nice memento.”

Sadie was presented with her mug by Geoff Proudlock, Chairman of Railway Housing Association, and Chief Executive Anne Rowlands.

Mr Proudlock said: “2014 was a significant year for Railway Housing Association as it marked our 95th anniversary and the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War.

“ 2014 was a significant year for Railway Housing Association ”

“When we were established in 1919, some of the first residents to be given homes were railwaymen who had left their jobs and families to fight for their country in the war, so this is something we are very proud of.”

Some of the people receiving 95th anniversary mugs were:

- Sadie Reid**
Auckland Avenue, Darlington
- Annie Alderson**
Plevna Mews, Shildon
- Victor Evans**
Stephenson Court, Hull
- Norma Windas**
Paterson House, Hull
- John Smith**
North Eastern Court - Gateshead
- Olive Speck**
Robinson Drive, York
- Freda Thomson**
Patrick Stirling Court, Doncaster
- Margaret Turner**
Hackworth Court, Stockton
- Marion Jones**
Great Western Court, Hereford

“We were keen to do something to mark our anniversary and decided that presenting mugs to residents who shared our birthday was a nice thing to do.”

“We are less than five years from celebrating our 100th anniversary, so we look forward to also sharing this with those who have received mugs.”

Rent update

The government has changed the way that we set your rent. We are now required to base rent increases on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%, rather than the previously used Retail Prices Index (RPI) plus 0.5%.

In September 2014, CPI was 1.2% so rents will be increased by 1.2% plus 1%, a total of 2.2%, from August 2015. We will write to give you one month's notice before the increase is made to your rent.

Since 2002 the government had said that all housing associations and local councils should calculate their rents in the same way to remove the differences between the rents they charged. It was intended that similar properties in the same area should have similar rents. These rents were called ‘target rents’.

Many rents were below the target rent and the government allowed these to be increased by an extra £2 per week each year until the target rent was reached. However, the government has now decided to end these increases.

The government has also decided that a different rent increase, which isn't limited to CPI plus 1%, can be made for our residents who have a household income of more than £60,000 a year. However, very few, if any, of our residents have an income that exceeds this amount and the cost of administering a different rent system for them is likely to outweigh any benefits. Therefore, we will apply the same rent increase for all residents regardless of their income.

If your tenancy started before 1989, your rent is set by the Fair Rent Officer every two years. Any proposed increase will still be based on CPI plus 1% a year but if the Fair Rent Officer sets a lower rent then we will charge you the rent set by the Fair Rent Officer.

We consulted with residents who are members of our focus groups about our budget for 2015/16, including the rent increase, and they agreed to the proposals.

Our main source of income is from rents and it is used to provide and maintain good quality homes and services for residents.



Last year's winner Albert Burrows receiving his award.

Good neighbour of the year

By now you should have received a leaflet through the post about our 2015 good neighbour of the year competition.

The award enables you to show your appreciation for a special neighbour and to reward someone who goes the extra mile.

This could be someone who does the shopping for you or other neighbours, clears snow from pathways in winter or just provides companionship and support.

If you know someone who deserves recognition please fill in the form on the back of the leaflet you were sent and return it in the Freepost envelope.

The winner, who receives £50 and a nice trophy to keep, will be announced at our annual residents' conference in York on 10th June.

Residents' conference

We are delighted to announce that over half of the residents attending our annual conference in June will be there for the first time.

This follows a leaflet we sent to all households inviting them to attend the conference, which takes place at the Royal York Hotel, York, on 10th June.

It will be pleasing to see lots of new faces at the event, as well as our 'regulars'. The theme of this year's event is our plans for the future and we will include a full report and photographs of the conference in the next edition of RHA News.

“It will be pleasing to see lots of new faces at the event, as well as our 'regulars'”

Gardening competition

We are once again planning to ask our residents to vote for which garden they think should win our annual gardening competition.

Over the course of the summer our gardening contractors, Landscape Solutions, will be taking pictures of gardens they feel deserve to be considered for the award.

The photographs will then be shown to members of our residents' focus groups, who will select the overall winner.

Last year's award went to Denise Gleeson, from Mainsforth Road, Ferryhill. Denise (whose garden is pictured opposite) won a trophy and £50 worth of High Street vouchers.



If you would like your garden, or the garden of another resident, to be considered for the 2015 award, please let us know so we can arrange for Landscape Solutions to take a photograph. You can call us on free phone 08000 0287428 or mobile phone friendly 0300 1230734 or email info@railwayha.co.uk

100 years young

Two of our residents recently celebrated very special birthdays

Our latest centenarian, Joseph Tarn, has credited walking more than five miles a day as the secret to his longevity, whilst Edna Smith just keeps going on and on, celebrating her amazing 103rd birthday in February.

A steady stream of people came to Mr Tarn's home in Escomb Road, Bishop Auckland, to congratulate him on reaching three figures, including our Tenancy Services Officer Claire Richardson, who presented him with some flowers.



Everyone commented on how Mr Tarn looks much younger than his 100 years, which he says is down to looking after himself.

“I still like stretching my legs or taking a run out in the car with my family to get some fresh air and a change of scenery”

“I have always been very active whether I was at work or at home, and I used to walk at least five miles every day,” he says.

“I can't quite manage that anymore but I still like stretching my legs or taking a run out in the car with my family to get some fresh air and a change of scenery.”

Mr Tarn only moved into his Railway Housing Association property two years ago, having lived most of his life in a house in Windsor Terrace, Shildon. Shildon born and bred, he says he had a happy childhood and he remembers his first job, aged 16, was as an errand boy for the Walter Wilson store in the town.

He then followed his father, as did many young people at the time, into employment at the Shildon Railway Works where he trained as a riveter, before becoming a welder. When he retired an amazing 49 years later he was Chief Foreman in charge of over 200 workers.

103rd birthday

Ask many people and they would say 1912 was the year when the famous ship Titanic sank – but for Mrs Smith's friends and family it is much better known as the year she came into the world!

To mark her 103rd birthday she was presented with flowers by our Chief Executive, Anne Rowlands. Mrs Smith was one of the first residents to move into the Association's Hackworth Court sheltered housing scheme when it opened in 1994. Hackworth Court was converted from the building of the original Stockton Railway Station.

She then joined her family and friends for a special birthday lunch where she stuck to the one glass of sherry that she says has stood her in good stead over the years.



“I still feel really well and I think it is because I like to keep myself busy”

Mrs Smith, who has 4 children, 11 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren and 8 great, great-grandchildren, said: “I still feel really well and I think it is because I like to keep myself busy, whether that is spending time with my family or playing bingo three times a week with my friends in Hackworth Court.

“I was one of the first residents to move in here when it opened and I got to choose one of the lovely rooms overlooking the old platform. Even now I like looking out of the window and waving at the train drivers as they go past, and they always wave back!”

Anne Rowlands said: “We were delighted to be able to share Mr Tarn and Mrs Smith's birthdays and it is great to see them doing so well. They are proof of the saying that age is just a number!”



Sayers Close

The residents' social club at Sayers Close in Leeds organises a wide range of social activities. There are weekly lunches in the communal lounge and regular DVD showings.

Two residents who were very active members of the social club have sadly passed away. Lily Davison was not only the oldest resident of Sayers Close but had also lived there the longest. She was at the centre of social activities and her home often acted as the 'call centre' for the social club.

Michael Tasker helped to organise many activities, days out, Christmas lunches and helped to get an area landscaped to improve the appearance of the scheme. Michael was also a member of Railway Housing Association's Board of Trustees.

Lily and Michael will be greatly missed by their friends and neighbours at Sayers Close.



Homes for Britain

We are supporting the National Housing Federation's Homes for Britain campaign.

By the time you read this the General Election will be close and the aim for Homes to Britain is to try to get housing at the top of the political agenda.

The Federation is calling on the next Government to publish a long-term plan for housing within a year of taking office that sets out how they will end the housing crisis with a generation.

We showed our support by having our logo included on a banner used in a Homes for Britain North East relay, which started in Berwick and ended in Whitby.



Like winning the lottery

Congratulations to Mr Elliott and Mr Kirtland, from Co.Durham, who have won £25 in our lettable standards draw.

Mr Elliott said "I feel like I've won the lottery moving here and winning the lettable standards draw is a lovely surprise. I'll put the money towards a heat gun so I can crack on with the decorating."

In brief...

...We have appointed two new contractors on five-year-old contracts as part of our ongoing commitment to demonstrate value for money and efficiency. Goldshield will now be responsible for maintaining the emergency lighting and fire detection systems at our sheltered housing schemes; and DFP will be responsible for servicing and maintaining the heating boilers at the schemes.

...Following certain types of repair work we will now be telephoning residents to find out what they thought of the work and the contractor that carried out the work. We are introducing this in response to feedback from residents at our 2014 residents' conference.

...On the subject of repairs, here are the timescales we have for carrying out different types of repairs and some examples for each:

Emergency Repairs (within 24 hours) - no heating, no electricity, no lighting, burst pipes, no water at all, the only toilet in the property is not flushing.

Urgent Repairs 1 (within 3 days) - partial heating, partial lights, overflow running, blocked sink.

Urgent Repairs 2 (within 7 days) - water pipe vibration, faulty stop cock/value, leaking cistern, dripping taps, repairs to windows that cannot be opened.

Routine Repairs (within 31 days) - extractor fan not working, fix rainwater pipes, repair kitchen cupboards, repair window handles, repairs to gates.

Our Performance

We constantly monitor and measure our performance to make sure that we are keeping to our promise to offer high quality services to our customers.

How we performed from 1 October 2014 to 31 December 2014

Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding - 2.20% (target is 1.90)



Lettings

Average time taken to repair and re-let an empty property - 40.93 days (target is 25 days)



An external organisation has looked at the way that we do things and we are making the changes that they recommended to improve our performance. This has already started to reduce the time taken to re-let homes.

Disabled Adaptations

Percentage of work completed within 4 weeks - 99% (target is 98%)



Response to Letters

Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days - 99% (target is 96%)



Response to Telephone Calls

Percentage of telephone calls answered within 7 seconds - 84.5% (target is 65%)



Green
Performance on target



Amber
Performance below but close to target



Red
Action is needed to meet target

Estate Inspections

Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months - 78% (target is 91%)



A number of estate inspections were completed just beyond the 6 months target earlier in the year. Performance has improved since the last report.

Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage - 84% (target is 95%)



The small number of complaints we receive means that if one isn't resolved at the first stage it has a big impact. Performance has improved since the last report.

Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service - 96% (target is 97%)



Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time - 84% (target is 86%)



Percentage of repairs completed on time - 99% (target is 98%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home - 82% (target is 90%)



Problems with cleaning homes prior to re-letting caused a decrease in satisfaction but this has now been resolved.

Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of total revenue spend - 1.77% (target is 1%)





Recipe: One pot chicken chasseur

This French bistro classic is easy to make at home and fabulous with creamy mash or crusty bread. It can be frozen and halved to go even further.

Preparation time: **15 minutes**

Cooking time: **1 hour 30 minutes**

Ingredients

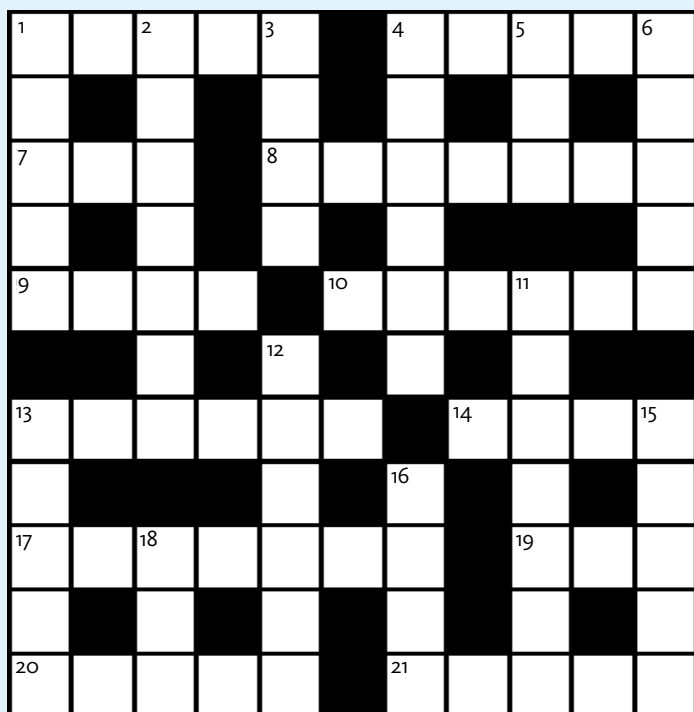
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 25g butter
- 4 chicken legs
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 200g pack small button or chestnut mushrooms
- 225ml red wine
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 thyme sprigs
- 500ml chicken stock

Per serving:

- Kcal: 439
- Fat: 28g
- Saturates: 10g
- Protein: 35g
- Fibre: 2g
- Carbs: 7g
- Sugar: 6g
- Salt: 1.11g



1. Heat the oil and half the butter in a large lidded casserole. Season the chicken, then fry for about 5 minutes on each side until golden brown. Remove and set aside.
2. Melt the rest of the butter in the pan. Add the onion, then fry for about 5 minutes until soft. Add garlic, cook for about 1 min, add the mushrooms, cook for 2 minutes, then add the wine. Stir in the tomato purée, let the liquid bubble and reduce for about 5 minutes, then stir in the thyme and pour over the stock. Slip the chicken back into the pan, then cover and simmer on a low heat for about 1 hr until the chicken is very tender.
3. Remove the chicken from the pan and keep warm. Rapidly boil down the sauce for 10 minutes or so until it is syrupy and the flavour has concentrated. Put the chicken legs back into the sauce and serve.



ACROSS

1. Concern (5)
4. Maxim (5)
7. Fruit (3)
8. Responded (7)
9. Chess piece (4)
10. Writer (6)
13. Sagacity (6)
14. Leave out (4)
17. Decorate food (7)
19. Beverage (3)
20. Stitched (5)
21. Travesty (5)

DOWN

1. Thin biscuit (5)
2. Areas (7)
3. Tall story (4)
4. Counting device (6)
5. Perform (3)
6. Duck (5)
11. Short-tailed burrowing rodent (7)
12. Aped (6)
13. Earnings (5)
15. Search and find (5)
16. Professional cook (4)
18. Uncooked (3)

To stand a chance of winning £25 in our prize crossword draw, please cut out and send your completed crossword to us at Railway Housing Association, Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, DL1 4DR. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number.

**WIN
£25**

The winner of our last crossword competition was Mrs Rowntree, from Martin Cheesman Court, York.

Contact information

This newsletter can be made available in other languages, or other formats such as Braille, large format, or audio tape, on request.

Railway Housing Association, Bank Top House, Garbutt Square, Neasham Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL1 4DR.

Tel: 01325 482125 | Fax: 01325 384641 | Web:

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