



Your Homes
Newcastle

Concierge Service newsletter June 2008

Contact us

This edition of the Concierge Service Newsletter was published in June 2008. For more information on the Concierge Service or any features in this newsletter please contact:

Helen Garbutt
Concierge Service Management Team
YHN House, Benton Park Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE7 7LX

Phone: 0191 278 8688
Fax: 0191 278 8687
E-mail: conciergeservice@yhn.org.uk
Website: www.yhn.org.uk

Useful Information

This information is about how we manage council homes in Newcastle. If you need this in your language or a different language phone 0191 278 8633. This information is also available in easy read, large print, Braille and audio tape. We can also arrange for you to see a British Sign Language interpreter.

Bengali	এই তথ্য হল ইউর হোমস নিউকাসল সম্বন্ধে। এবং আমরা কিভাবে দায়িত্ব পালন করছি সে সম্বন্ধে। ইউর হোমস নিউকাসল, নিউকাসল সিটি কাউন্সিলের পক্ষে কাউন্সিলের ঘর বাড়ী ব্যবস্থাপনার দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত। এই তথ্য যদি <বাংলায়> অথবা অন্য কোন ভাষায় প্রয়োজন হয় তাহলে এই মাধ্যমে ফোন করুন- ০১৯১ ২৭৮ ৮৬৩৩
Chinese Simplified	这是有关代表纽卡斯尔市政府（Newcastle City Council）负责管理市政房屋的 Your Homes Newcastle（您的纽卡斯尔住房）组织的信息，内容解释了我们是如何运作。如果您需要此信息的普通话版本或其它语言版本，请致电 0191 278 8633 索取。
Chinese Traditional	這是關於 Your Homes Newcastle（您的紐卡素住房）機構的信息，內容解釋了我們代表紐卡素市政府（Newcastle City Council）負責管理市政房屋以及如何運作。如果您需要此信息的廣東話版本或其它語言版本，請致電 0191 278 8633 索取。
Farsi	بن اطلاعات درباره سازمان «خانه های شما در نیوکاسل» و عملکرد آن است. این سازمان از سوی شهرداری نیوکاسل، سولیت اداره خانه های دولتی را به عهده دارد. در صورت نیاز به این اطلاعات به زبان فارسی یا زبان های دیگر با شماره تلفن ۰۱۹۱۲۷۸۸۶۳۳ تماس بگیرید.
French	Ces informations concernent Your Homes Newcastle : qui est chargé de gérer les logements sociaux au nom de la municipalité de Newcastle et comment nous procédons. Si vous avez besoin de ces informations en français ou dans une autre langue, téléphonez au : 0191 278 8633.
Kurdish	ئهم زانیاریانه سهبارت به Your Homes Newcastle و چۆنیانی کارکردنه که به له لایهن شۆرای شاری نیوکاسلوه نکرکی ئهوهی پێدراوه که خانووکانی شۆرای شار بهرتوه بهرایانی بکات. ئهگهرهزان له وهرگرانی ئهم زانیاریانه به زمانی کوردی یا ههر زمانیکی دیکه ههیه به زماره تلیفۆنی 0191 278 8633 پێوهندی بگرن.
Russian	Esta informação refere-se à Your Homes Newcastle, a organização responsável pela gestão da habitação social em nome do Município de Newcastle, e a nossa situação actual. Se precisar desta informação em <português> ou noutra língua, queira ligar para o 0191 278 8633.
Spanish	Ésta es información sobre Your Homes de Newcastle, que es la responsable de gestionar las viviendas municipales en nombre del Ayuntamiento de Newcastle, y sobre nuestra manera de hacerlo. Si necesita esta información en español o en otro idioma, llame al 0191 278 8633.

Foreword

Welcome to this edition of the Concierge Service newsletter. It has been some time since our last edition and during that time, we have seen some changes within the service. Helen Garbutt joined the team last summer as the new Concierge Service Manager and since then, has spent time out on site with staff across the City and has met quite a number of Tenants and Residents groups, getting to understand the issues which are important to you. Helen has a number of targets to work on during the forthcoming year to take the concierge service forward.



We have just been awarded the highest rating possible by the Audit Commission following our recent inspection. In their final report, the inspectors recognised the concierge service as a valuable service to tenants which helps to support housing management services and helps people stay in their homes. They also acknowledged the partnership working done to maintain cleaning standards within blocks of flats across the City with the Living in Flats Group which is part of Newcastle Tenants Federation.

I hope that you find the information in this newsletter helpful and would welcome any feedback or comments you have on the service.

Allison Hodgson
Area Director

The Concierge Service is one of the services provided by Your Homes Newcastle for tenants and leaseholders of Newcastle City Council.

Your Homes Newcastle is an independent company set up by the Council in April 2004 to manage their housing stock.

The company's headquarters are in YHN House, Benton Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7LX, telephone number, 0191 278 8600. The website address is www.yhn.org.uk.



We want to know what you think!

We are committed to putting you first and providing great customer service. We have service standards so that all our customers are clear about the level of service they can expect to receive from us.

Our Service Standards

- We will give you a welcome pack when you move in. We aim to do this within seven days for 90% of new tenants.
- We will inspect your building every three months to make sure our service provider is keeping to our cleaning standard. We will display our cleaning work schedule in your building. We will invite tenants' representatives to all our inspections and we will make the results available to you if you ask.
- When you move in, we will discuss the Concierge service with you, and explain your responsibilities as a tenant. We aim to do this within seven days for 90% of new tenants.
- We will carry out safety and security checks every day.

We are always keen to hear your comments about our service standards and the service we offer you. You might want to complain about something you feel we have done badly or compliment us when we have done a great job. We also welcome suggestions about how we can improve what we do.

How can I get in touch?

You can give us your feedback on the Concierge Service by e-mailing yhncomplaints@yhn.org.uk or by logging onto the Your Homes Newcastle website at www.yhn.org.uk.

You can also have your say by completing the questionnaire which you received with this newsletter.

Fuel bills: is your meter getting it right?

We have been working with the Energy Centre to help tenants reduce their fuel bills and protect the environment. They provide energy management and advice services to Newcastle City Council, Your Homes Newcastle and to Newcastle's residents. With energy prices constantly rising, we all need to be careful with our energy use, not only to reduce fuel bills but also to help to protect the environment.

Adelaide House is a multi-storey block in Benwell. The flats have storage heaters and electricity bills should be on Economy 7, where the night rate electricity is cheaper

than the day rate. Over the last year we have visited 47 of the flats and found 19 cases of tenants being overcharged for their electricity. This is mainly due to day and night rates being incorrectly billed after new meters were installed. Refunds to tenants have been as high as £500.

So if you or your Tenants and Residents Association would like some advice and information about domestic heating bills, or how your home might benefit from new insulation, please contact the Energy Centre by phone on 0191 281 1303 or email: energy@newcastle.gov.uk

We've kept our Charter Mark



The Concierge Service has continued to develop since it was awarded the Government Charter Mark for excellent customer service in 2006. The service was recently inspected and the concierge staff were pleased to hear that standards have continued to improve, allowing the Concierge Service to retain the prestigious Charter Mark award.

The Charter Mark inspection shows that we proactively offer a wide range of services to our customers, including the security packages available in all our multi-storey properties.

We have also made improvements in staff training, safety security inspections, and introduced spot cleaning checks in all blocks.

The new freephone number available 24 hours a day also means that our customers can now contact us at a time that suits them to let us know about any compliments, complaints or comments they have.



My role as Concierge Service Manager includes developing the Concierge Service. This means that I look at how we perform, consult with our customers to find out their opinions and think about future improvements and business planning.



Helen Garbutt, Concierge Service Manager

I like receiving compliments about the service we offer, I love hearing that we are doing a good job and that we've made a difference or gone that extra mile to provide brilliant service. Members of staff appreciate the feedback too and it helps us learn what our customers value about the service.

I think our service gives peace of mind to tenants about safety and security but Concierges also do lots of smaller things like keeping keys and accepting parcels – the smaller things which can really make a difference to peoples' lives.

Being spread out over more than 50 sites across the city means I don't get to see front-line staff regularly. I try to spend at least one day every month in lodges finding out from staff and customers what the key issues and concerns are, but it still isn't enough.

Meet the supervisors

A Concierge Supervisor is on duty 24 hours a day every day of the year so you can always speak to a member of staff about any problems you may have. Each Supervisor is also responsible for regularly checking blocks to make sure they meet our high standards of cleanliness.

Paul Marshall

Titan House, Hexham House, Churchwalk House, The Beeches, The Willows, Haughton Court, The Cedars, The Pines, Beechgrove Road, Hareside Court and Manor Grove.

Tony Houchin

Proctor Court, Vale House, St Anne's Close, Gibson Street, The Spinney, Melbourne Court, Shieldfield House, Maytree Road, Mather Road, Waverley Road, Dean House, Walkerdean House, Eastfield House.

Terry McDonough

Pandon Court, King Charles Tower, Lort House, Merlay Hall, Hunter House, Wardroper House, The Hawthorns, The Poplars, Kings Meadows, Warrington Road, Kirkwood Drive, Blagdon Street.

Joe Flood

Westgate Court, Vallum Court, Todds Nook, Molineux Court, Grafton House, Heaton Park Court, Cruddas Park House, Banbury Road, Hillsvie Avenue, Apsley Crescent, Dovercourt Road.

Laurie Maxwell

Moorland House, Beaumont House, Brockwell House, Colwyn Place, Moulton Place, St Anthony's House, Graham Park Road, Moor End, The Drive, Breamish House, Henry Square, Napier Street.

Tony Darling

Adelaide House, Hilltop House, Denton Park House, Shaftoe Court, Hewitt Court, Queen's Court, Fawdon Park House, Mill House, Harehills, Wyndley House, Tynedale House, Shipley Walk, Shipley Rise, Felton Walk, Northumberland & Dunn Terrace.

How do I know when my block check is happening?

Look out for posters advertising block checks and cleaning schedules in your block. You can also visit www.yhn.org.uk to see the dates and times of inspections.

How clean are our blocks?

During the round of inspections which were carried out at the beginning of the year (January to March), 80 blocks were inspected for cleanliness.

All of the blocks which YHN is responsible for cleaning reached a satisfactory standard or higher:

Very good – 25%

Good – 65%

Satisfactory – 10%

Some blocks which are part of the Concierge service are cleaned by Neighbourhood Services - Concierge Supervisors inspect these regularly too to make sure high standards are maintained. They were rated as:

Very good – 9%

Good – 40%

Satisfactory – 51%

Tynedale House

Things have changed at Tynedale House since Pat McMaster became the Resident Concierge.

When she arrived three years ago, Modern Homes work was beginning and the entire block - which is in the West End of Newcastle - was undergoing a major revamp inside and out.

Pat says: "The construction work had just got underway, so the block was not in its best state for the best part of 18 months. We had to work extra hard just to keep the place clean and tidy and cut down disruption to residents."

Pat believes that keeping Tynedale House sparkling has encouraged tenants to look after the block and built an atmosphere where everybody pulls together. Tynedale House's excellent levels of cleanliness were recently commented on by Audit Commission experts who visited the multi-storey during their recent inspection of YHN.



Pat continues: "We've got some residents who moved into Tynedale House when it was first built and are still here four decades on. The residents see that I care about the property and that makes them want to look after it themselves. It is really quite simple and as a result they all enjoy living in a pleasant, safe and secure block."

Pat introduced more of a community spirit among the block's residents by encouraging the creation of a lunch club, run by Community Service Volunteers, and a social evening that takes place in the block's community flat. She's also started up a small garden and successfully applied for a grant to provide residents, all of whom are over 55, with a shared computer and broadband internet access. She's also planning an event to celebrate the block's 40th birthday later this year.



Frequently asked questions about the concierge service

Who manages the service?

A small team based at YHN House manages, supports and supervises the service.

Will the concierge staff remove people who do not have permission to be in the blocks?

No. Our staff will tell the person to leave, and if they refuse, we will call the police.

What should I do if I lose my access fob (key)?

What should I do if I lose my access fob (key?) - You can report it to your concierge or Community Housing Office. The Housing Office will give you a form which you can give to your concierge for a new fob. The Concierge can ensure you access to the building whilst you wait for your replacement fob.

I have visitors staying with me. Will the concierge staff stop them from coming into the block when I'm not in?

No. Tell the staff how long your visitors are staying and we will give them a temporary fob (key).

I'm not sure if my smoke/intruder alarms work.

The Concierge can show you how to use your intruder alarm and if you contact them will check that they are working. We would recommend that you have the concierge check your alarms for you regularly.

What is the difference between the 24 Hour Concierge service and the resident concierge service?

The 24 hour Concierge service is provided by our staff working three shifts consecutively to cover around the clock. The Resident Concierge service is provided by 1 person who may live on-site. They work 8.00am - 4.00pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and 4 hour shifts on Wednesday and Saturday. When the Resident is not on site you can access the service through the freephone number 0800 731 389. There is a charge for both services.

What should I do if there is an emergency in my block, such as a fire or power cut?

A 'stay put' policy is in operation within all the blocks that we manage. This means that you should 'stay put' when safe to do so in any emergency situation, such as a fire or a power cut, which does not involve your property or properties either side or below.

We sent a letter to every resident earlier this year that tells you what you should do in an emergency. If you have lost your letter or need a replacement, please let your Concierge know as soon as possible so they can give you the right information.

London Marathon

Concierge Shift Supervisor Tony Houchin raised hundreds of pounds for a good cause by completing this year's London Marathon.

It was the first time Tony, 46, has done the world-famous race, and he completed it in four and half hours raising £750 for Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Tony is no stranger to distance running events - he's done the Great North Run three times

as well as the Glasgow half marathon and several local 10km races.

He said: "Apart from the aches and pains, I thoroughly enjoyed the marathon. The support from spectators was fantastic, they handed out drinks, jelly babies and fruit and shouted encouragement. I've applied for next year's race and will find out in October whether I've been successful."



I'm the Concierge Service Co-ordinator. That means that I deal with the day-to-day-management of a group of 150 staff based in locations across the city. The staff I manage do everything from monitoring CCTV to cleaning duties to assisting vulnerable tenants.



Dominic Connor,
Concierge Service Co-ordinator

I've spent most of my career in local authorities and housing management – before I joined the Concierge Service I worked as a Senior Housing Officer.

One of the biggest responsibilities of my job is to report directly to customers and tenant groups about the standards we aim to achieve and how we will improve our service even more.

I'm always keen to encourage feedback, both positive and negative, from the people we deal with. I only wish that people would comment more on the service we provide so I can continue to make improvements to the Concierge Service.

I like dealing with a large number of staff and I'm particularly proud of the steps we have taken to improve the cleanliness of blocks.

I believe the Concierges provide tenants with peace of mind by providing a friendly face who works to encourage a safe, secure and clean environment for everyone.

Customer information - why we ask for it and what we do with it

Over the last few months many of you will have had a visit from one of our staff asking you for information about yourselves and the people who live with you. You will have been asked to provide personal details such as your date of birth, ethnic origin, language and religion, and we also asked about any illnesses or disabilities.

We ask you for this information because we want to make sure that we provide the services that our customers need and that all our customers are able to access those services. To do this we need information from as many customers as possible.

If we understand the needs and requirements of our customers we can work out what we need to do to provide services to meet these requirements. This cuts costs, reduces waste and benefits all our customers. We also use the information to make sure our staff deliver services to our customers in the most appropriate way.

All the personal information we collect is treated as confidential - we do not give individual personal information to anyone else. We may share appropriate information with our contractors but only if it helps our customers. For example, we may tell our repairs contractor that a customer has difficulty hearing.

Using the information our customers have told us about themselves to make adjustments to the way we provide services is part of our commitment to providing excellent services to you.

A day in the life of a concierge



John Dixon is a Concierge working at the Byker Wall.



'After getting the number 62 bus to work in Byker, I spend my mornings cleaning and disposing of rubbish and keeping my particular area clean and tidy.

'In the past I've faced quite a few cleaning challenges, anything from fly-tipping to dog dirt. The rest of my day is taken up with block checks and keeping an eye on the CCTV footage that keeps Byker Wall residents safe and secure.

'I've been doing this job five years and before that I was a machine operator and warehouse man.

'A minority of people can cause problems, and unfortunately we have to deal on occasion with ignorant, drunken or rude people who show no respect either to older people who live in the block or to myself and my colleagues.'

'But generally working with the public is the most enjoyable part of the work. I like meeting them and finding out about their needs and what makes them happy. It gives me a real sense of job satisfaction.'

Denton Park House

The Concierge team came to the aid of residents during a recent power cut at Denton Park House, a multi-storey tower block in West Denton, earlier this year.

We made sure we provided support and reassurance when the lights went out, including talking with the power company and knocking on every door in the block to reassure people and to distribute torches to those who needed them. Finally our shift supervisor took up flasks of hot drinks to residents to ensure they had refreshments during the disruption.

Concierge Shift Supervisor Laurie Maxwell said: "This was a serious power cut and our staff went the extra mile to reassure residents, making them feel as safe and secure as possible."

More information online

Want to find out more about what we do? Your Homes Newcastle's website contains lots of information about the Concierge Service.

Log on to www.yhn.org.uk/tenancy_services/concierge_service.aspx to find out more about how we are performing against our service standards and to see the dates and times of block checks and cleaning schedules for your block.

You can also submit a form online to tell us what you think about what we do and how you think we can improve our service.

Useful numbers

Repair Call 0845 1138888

Envirocall 0191 274 4000

Gas Servicing/Repairs 0191 278 3218

Nightwatch 0300 1000 101

Moneywise Credit Union 0191 276 7957

CCAS 0191 278 8699



Your Homes
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