

# Streets Ahead

## YOUR CHANCE TO IMPROVE SERVICES

On the RCRA page of this edition of Streets Ahead, Jenny Hill, the Chairman of the group talks about the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and how tenants are being asked to help set local standards of service. The TSA is a new body, and from April of this year, councils as well as housing associations come under the TSA's control.

One of the driving principles of the TSA is that "every tenant matters", and that councils must engage with residents to set local standards about how the service is provided. Between now and October the Council, working with the RCRA and other tenants, will be working on our 'Runnymede' standards.

This is where you come in!

Whilst the RCRA will play an important role in helping to develop our local standards, the more tenants we hear from, and the more ideas and views we get, the more representative our standards will be – which has to be better.

You don't have to join a Committee or sign up for anything more than you can manage. It may be that all we will ask of you is to complete the occasional questionnaire, or respond to a telephone survey. You may want to take part in a focus group, lasting no more than a couple of hours, or perhaps take part in a scrutiny panel, which might meet two or three times a year and will look

at how the Council has performed. Your commitment needs to be no more than that, and every little will help to develop and improve services so they meet the expectations of the people who are on the receiving end – YOU!

Of course you may feel that you would like to join the RCRA itself, and be at the heart of developing priorities and how services might be provided. Your level of commitment is entirely down to you, but what the Council does want is for as many tenants as possible to take part in this exercise, so that the standards we establish by October truly reflect the wishes of the majority.

If you feel you could give a little of your time to help develop our local standards please complete the enclosed slip and return in the pre-paid envelope provided.

We would love to hear from you. This is your chance to shape the way services are provided, so if you feel you can help make a difference please get in touch.



## Clean Up Day at Holbrook Meadow Estate



On a sunny Tuesday in April staff from the Tenancy Management Team met with residents and children at Holbrook Meadow in Egham to help clean up and improve the look of the estate.

Following a street meeting last year and an evening meeting in March 2010 the residents identified the need for a 'clean up' day.

Chocolates were offered to any children who helped collect litter and rubbish and with the Police, representatives of Safer Runnymede, one resident and eleven children on hand to help the estate was soon looking clean and tidy.

Christina Jensen the Tenancy Management Officer for Egham organised the day and she arranged for the use of the mechanical street cleaner to be present and for all the rubbish to be disposed of after the event.

Those who were involved in this very successful day hope we will now be able to form a residents group that meets regularly with the Council and other agencies to identify improvements to the estate and to set local standards.

## UNAUTHORISED OCCUPANCY

Has your neighbour sub-let his or her home? Should you care?

The Council thinks you should. There are currently over 2,500 households on the housing register seeking accommodation. Many of these households have been waiting a long time, and live in quite poor housing conditions, so it is important that the Council makes sure that every one of its homes is used effectively.

Unauthorised occupancy takes a number of forms. It might be where a tenant moves out, claims to still live in the property and sub-lets it to somebody else: probably charging a higher rent than he or she pays the Council. The tenant might live somewhere else, and only use their council home as a second home or holiday let. The tenant might sell on the key for a lump sum – and allow somebody else to live in their home. It might be a case of wrongly claimed succession, where somebody not entitled to succeed to a tenancy claims the right to take on the tenancy following the death of a tenant.

Whatever the reason, such unauthorised occupation means that more deserving cases may be missing out on an affordable, decent home. The Audit Commission estimates that nationally as many as 50,000 socially rented homes are not occupied by the rightful tenant, and with waiting lists continuing to grow, this is unacceptable.

Whilst the Council doesn't think there is a major problem of unauthorised occupancy in the borough, just one case is one too many and whichever way you look at it, this is wrong.

If you share the Council's concerns about unauthorised occupancy and suspect a property near you may be occupied by somebody not entitled to be there, you can report your suspicions in complete confidence by telephoning 01932 425821.





# RCRA

## Runnymede Council Residents' Association

The RCRA now have a page on the Council's Website. You can visit it on [www.runnymede.gov.uk](http://www.runnymede.gov.uk) click on Housing, and then click on Runnymede Council Residents' Association.

# TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY



As from the 1st April 2010 The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the new regulator for social housing.

The aim of the TSA is to ensure that all tenants obtain the same level of services wherever they live, and whilst the TSA will set National

Standards (after consultation with Housing Providers and tenants), tenants are going to be asked to become more involved in setting the local standards. This is where you, as tenants, along with the R.C.R.A Committee will become involved. Over the next few months the RCRA along with other tenants will be looking at the way in which the Council provide services, such as repairs to see whether or not they can be improved and whether they comply with the standard set by the TSA.

The first of such meetings took place in Englefield Green. We went through the standards for repairs and maintenance and suggested some amendments which I am pleased to say have now been incorporated into the standards.

At our next meeting we will be looking at the standards for anti-social behaviour and again making suggestions for improvements. We will also be looking at setting the standards for the service.

Details of the Council's service standard will be published in a future edition of Streets Ahead which will ensure that all tenants know what the standards are.

As mentioned one of the main aims of the TSA is to ensure tenants are consulted with and actively encouraged to become involved. One of the areas in which we the RCRA can keep you informed of what we are doing on your behalf is to put the minutes of our meetings on our web page. We realise that not all tenants have access to a computer and if you would like to have a copy of the minutes sent to you please let me know by telephoning me on 01932 568405 or 07811 863565



Jenny Hill, RCRA Chairman

## THE ASSOCIATION OF RETAINED COUNCIL HOUSES. (ARCH)

As I have mentioned before in *Streets Ahead* Runnymede Borough Council is a member of ARCH. The ARCH Executive wanted to make sure that Residents' views were taken into account when making any representations to the Government on policies to do with social housing. An ARCH Tenant Sub-Group was formed and as your chairman I attend meetings 3/4 times a year. The sub-group is now making progress (in its make-up) and has asked that any responses to Government proposals are put before the sub-group prior to them being submitted.

## SURREY WIDE INVOLVEMENT GROUP (SWIG)



The Surrey Wide Involvement Group (SWIG) enables tenants & leaseholders to swap views and experiences with other like-minded local authority and housing association tenants with a view

to gaining a greater understanding of those issues affecting them.

Runnymede Borough Council tenants are actively involved in this group which organises events throughout Surrey – in fact I was delighted to recently be voted vice chair of the group.

In addition to workshops, the events organised give residents the opportunity to meet with local authority and housing association tenants from all over Surrey.

In further additions of *Streets Ahead* I will update you on the activities of the group and keep you informed of our progress.



Our picture shows residents from Fair Oaks Court and Lane Close in Addlestone who got together recently for a planting and clean up day in their neighbourhood. The event organised by the Lane Close Residents' Group has made some excellent improvements to the local area.



**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

**RCRA Annual General Meeting : Tuesday 20th July 7.00p.m – 9.00p.m**

The Hythe Centre, Egham. Invitations to follow.

## NEW ASB OFFICERS



In November last year we appointed two new Anti-Social Behaviour Officers working on a job share basis.

Angela Horsey who works on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Jenny Tilling who works Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Jenny and Angela work closely together and with the rest of the Tenancy Management Team dealing with all levels of anti-social behaviour.

They have a good working relationship with colleagues from other agencies, including the Police and Social Services. Under the Surrey-wide Information Protocol they are able to exchange information with other agencies who have also signed up to the protocol. This enables us to tackle anti-social behaviour in the most effective and appropriate way.

We also participate in meetings of the Joint Action Group (JAG), a multi – agency group which deals with locations that suffer from anti-social behaviour, and the Community Incident Action Group (CIAG), a multi – agency group which covers issues relating to one or more identifiable individuals.

If you wish to discuss anything related to anti social behaviour Jenny and Angela can be contacted on 01932 425819 or by emailing [jenny.tilling@runnymede.gov.uk](mailto:jenny.tilling@runnymede.gov.uk) or [angela.horsey@runnymede.gov.uk](mailto:angela.horsey@runnymede.gov.uk).

## Gas Servicing

It is a sad fact that people still die every year from carbon monoxide poisoning and in the majority of cases these deaths could be avoided by simply having the gas appliance in the home checked.

Runnymede Borough Council is required by law to check any gas installation in its properties. This service is provided free of charge to our tenants during the spring and summer months to also ensure the heating systems are in good working order before the winter starts. To receive this service all you have to do is to allow our contractor the opportunity to carry out the relevant tests and inspections.

The Councils contractor, Robert Heath Heating, will also look to check on the condition of your cold water tank and this may on occasion mean they have to get into the loft. This inspection is a visual check to ensure that the water in your home is free from contamination. By carrying out some simple measures, such as regularly cleaning any taps and showers of lime scale and disinfecting them by using a simple wipe and probably more importantly, ensuring that you run just hot water through your taps at least once a month for a couple of minutes, you can also help ensure that contamination is kept to a minimum. If you do run your hot water taps, please make sure that young children are kept away from the bathroom and any tap, to avoid any chance of scalding.

We also recommend that if you go away from the property for a short holiday or break, you run all the taps, both hot and cold, for several minutes, on your return before using any appliance. This removes any 'stale' water that could have sat in the pipes whilst you were away.

Finally, over the last few years the council has invested in new, safer, more efficient heating systems as part of our aims to provide high quality homes for our tenants. However, some tenants have still taken the opportunity to install their own gas fires and whilst the council accepts this situation, it does mean that the servicing of these appliances are the tenants responsibility

Our new gas servicing contract also provides you with the chance of contacting the contractor, Robert Heath Heating, free on 0800 121 4115, between 6.30am -10.00pm (Monday to Fridays) and 8.30–5.00pm over the week ends, making it even easier to make your appointments. You can also report any break downs of your heating system directly to the contractor on the above number.



## Social Centre's for Older People

Runnymede Borough Council operates four friendly Centres for Older People around the borough; they all have a lively atmosphere and provide support and the opportunity to meet people and make new friends.

The Centre's provide the opportunity to try out many activities including Tai Chi, Mobile Phone training, (with a further course starting later in the year) and also computer courses, the next of which is starting in May 2010 at the Woodham and New Haw Centre.

If you are interested in any of the above or would like further details please call Community Services on 01932 425868.

Do you feel a little daunted at the prospect of visiting one of our 4 Social Centres for Older People? We offer our **Chaperone Service**

Our Centre Chaperone would be delighted to accompany you to your chosen Centre and introduce you to the Manager, who will make you very welcome. In no time you will make new friends and enjoy the warm atmosphere found in each Centre

**Delightful venues for Hire**

Have you a birthday or Anniversary celebrations to organise and want a delightful venue to hire? We let out Social Centres at very competitive prices

## MYSTERY SHOPPING

A number of Runnymede residents are currently working on a project together with residents of Elmbridge Housing Association to Mystery Shop both organisations.

The project will involve residents making telephone enquiries and calling at the offices to test the services we provide. They will record their findings and when the project is complete they will be invited back to tell us how we are doing.

Hopefully this scheme will highlight areas we can improve on in our quest to provide a better service for all our residents.

In the next edition of *Streets Ahead* we will publish our findings and feedback to you the things we do well and things we are not so good at.

If you would like to take part in a future Mystery Shopping exercise, please call Jane Margetts on 01932 425824



## Stop wasting water



Did you know that water companies have to use energy to supply mains water to our homes? We then use more energy heating it up for baths, showers and washing up.

If we all made some simple and quick changes in our homes, we could save loads of water.

- **Snub the tub**

If everybody in a four person family replaced one bath a week with a 5 minute shower, you could save between £5 and £15 per year off your energy bill. So, opt for short, refreshing showers on a daily basis and keep baths to a minimum.

- **Fill 'em up!**

Make sure that your dishwashers and washing machines are full before putting them on and always use the most water and energy efficient settings. When it's time to replace your appliance, look for Energy Saving Recommended logo. Products with this logo will save both energy and water.

- **Suds law**

Using a bowl to wash up rather than leaving the hot tap running could save around £25 a year on a household's gas bills, if you wash up twice a day. If you must rinse, wash up or prepare vegetables in the sink, use cold water where possible and don't keep the tap running!

- **Go off the boil**

Only boil as much water as you need to avoid unnecessarily heating water you won't even use!

- **Turn it off**

A running tap wastes over 6 litres of water a minute so turn off the tap whilst brushing your teeth, shaving or washing your face and use cold water where you don't need hot.

- **Don't be a drip**

A dripping tap can waste over 5,000 litres of water a year so make sure your taps are properly turned off and change washers promptly when taps start dripping.

- **Make it go further**

Where possible try and reuse unused water, for example pour your left over glasses of water on houseplants and avoid wasting water from running taps whilst waiting for hot water.

**Reduce, re-use and recycle**

In the UK, we produce enough waste to fill the Albert Hall every two hours and most of this will end up in landfill sites. By recycling more, preventing food waste and composting at home you can do your bit to help reduce this impact.

**Worried about paying your fuel bills next winter?**

If you are worried you can call the Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99 - they can give you help and advice about paying your fuel bills.



## Twenty Years Service



Runnymede Borough Council and the residents of Surrey Towers would like to say a huge thank you to Mrs Hilda Reeve who has served as Secretary and more recently as Chairperson of Surrey Towers Residents' group since 1988.

After over 20 years Hilda has decided to stand down and a new committee has been formed.

Over the years Hilda has organised many social events, day trips and holidays for the group which have been a huge success and have been enjoyed by many residents.

Well done and thank you Hilda, we hope you have a very happy retirement.

## Transfer Applicants and the condition of their properties

Runnymede, along with the other partner landlords in SEARCHMOVES, (Elmbridge Housing Trust and A2Dominion) have a common approach when dealing with properties that are in a poor condition.

We understand that tenants need to transfer to larger or smaller homes but it costs the Council a lot of money each time people move if we have to bring the home they are vacating up to standard.

Part of the tenancy conditions for every tenant is that they have to maintain their home and not allow it to deteriorate.

When a tenant is successful in their bid for a new property we always carry out a home visit first. If on that home visit we are concerned about a property we will notify the tenant, asking that the problems are put right.

Where a property is in poor condition, the tenant will not be able to bid for alternative vacancies until the Council is satisfied that adequate improvements have been made.

We understand how difficult it can be to maintain a large property and garden, particularly if the tenant is elderly or disabled. We encourage tenants in larger properties to consider 'downsizing' to a more suitable property, and can help with the costs of moving with an incentive payment.

If you do wish to discuss any of the above please contact the Allocations Team on 01932 425831



## Chertsey Children's Centre



At Chertsey Children's Centre we offer an extensive range of Adult Learning Courses from improving your Maths to cooking for Babies. We run family support sessions including a special needs drop in session and a monthly Dad's club. We run toddler groups and 'Stay and Play' sessions and we are very excited to be able to use the Pavilion at Gogmore Park where we hope to run lots more activities for our local families.

Our local Health Visitors make regular contact offering advice for parents and parents to be. Throughout the half term holidays we run the Smile's for Miles around club where families can come along enjoy arts and crafts activities and take advantage of the beautiful outside space.

Our expert staff are always on hand to offer support and advice from anything such as parenting to financial advice. Karen Henfrey our Outreach Worker supports local families who have children 0-5yrs who may be experiencing difficulties and Vicky Wilson our Admin and Information officer is also on hand to offer support and guidance. Vicky is also the Home School Link worker for the Chertsey Partnership offering support and guidance for families with school age children.

If you would like to find out what the Chertsey Children's Centre can offer you or your family then please call on 01932 568758 or email [surestart@chertsey.surrey.sch.uk](mailto:surestart@chertsey.surrey.sch.uk) we look forward to hearing from you.