

chat...

Customer magazine
Spring 2011

What's new?

Mystery shopper checks
out our service

Ways to save money in your
new-look magazine

Our new service promise

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Welcome to your new-look magazine



Lee Whitehouse

Welcome to your new-look Chat magazine – my name is Lee Whitehouse and I’m a member of the Tenants’ Editorial Panel. We’ve been working with the team at Black Country Housing Group to put this magazine together and we’ve already started planning the summer issue. Why don’t you send us a reader’s letter or an interesting article? It’s your magazine – you can get involved too.



Thinking about your Next Step?

Free careers advice service for anyone aged 19 or over

Practical help and advice on:

- Careers and the job market
- CVs and covering letters
- Job interviews and presentation skills
- Finding learning and training
- Identifying your skills and options

Help is available online, over the phone, or face-to-face at a venue local to you.

To find out more search online for Next Step or call 0800 100 900



"We were given full marks on their questionnaire and the service was graded as "excellent".

Mystery shopper checks out our service

Mystery shoppers have been out and about in the Black Country. Quality Housing Services are independent auditors who check us out anonymously because it really helps to test our services. This is what the mystery shopper experienced when they enquired about the need for a gardener. "As soon as I entered the office, I was acknowledged by a member of staff at the reception who then offered assistance. I made my enquiry and the member of staff gave me all the necessary information I required... they were friendly and helpful." We were given full marks on their questionnaire and the service was graded as "excellent".

Meet the team

A week in the life of Kelly

Say hello to Kelly Dyas – she’s our new lettings and customer services co-ordinator. Some of you will already know Kelly because she’s worked for Black Country Housing Group for over six years.

It’s Kelly’s job to re-let our properties when they become empty and to let our new properties when we have built or bought them.

This involves working with our maintenance team to make sure that any work needed to bring the property up to the right standard is completed before new tenants move in. Kelly also works closely with the local authorities as we take most of our housing nominations from them.

Kelly’s typical week means taking around 150 calls from people either looking for a home or existing tenants making general enquiries. She arranges around 10 new viewings, visits to tenants who have just moved in and visits to any tenants who are moving out.

"We also offer properties that can be purchased under the shared ownership scheme and so I work with local estate agents to market these to first-time buyers. When someone who owns shares in their home wants



Kelly Dyas at one of our road shows

to buy more shares, I work with them to ensure this goes as smoothly as possible," said Kelly.

"We are always looking at how we can improve services and so we ask all new tenants for their feedback on moving in. All comments – good or bad – are reviewed and we use your feedback to make changes for the better," she added.

How are we doing?

We have promised to publish our performance results in our customer newsletters and on our website. Here’s a summary of our latest results.

We have made a big improvement in our routine repairs service – these are general repairs that we carry out within 28 days after they are logged. These

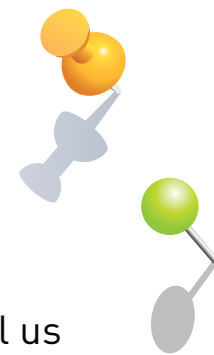
include minor electrical faults, small repairs to plumbing and heating and fixing problems with paths, paving and fences.

For a full report on how we are doing, go to www.bcha.co.uk

PI Code & Short Name	Current Target	February 2011	Traffic Light
Tenant Satisfaction - Repairs	95%	96.6%	🟢
Responsive Repairs Carried out to Target - Emergency	100%	100%	🟢
Responsive Repairs Carried out to Target - Urgent	95%	100%	🟢
Responsive Repairs Carried out to Target - Routine	95%	98.5%	🟢
NEW KPI 014 Complaints Received	5	2	🟢
NEW KPI 015 Complaint Turnaround Times	5 days	21 days	🔴

🔴 Alert 🟡 Warning 🟢 OK

Customers only



Every issue this is where we publish your letters, questions and suggestions. Your feedback helps us to improve our services, so please get involved and tell us what you think. We'd love to hear your views. Please write to Black Country Housing Group Ltd, 134 High Street, Blackheath, West Midlands B65 0EE

How can I get a walk-in shower?

A member of our Tenants' Editorial Panel has been asked this question by one of her neighbours.

Simple adaptations such as lever taps and grab rails can be carried out as part of our normal maintenance service – all you have to do is contact us if you think it will make it easier for you.

With more complex improvements – such as walk-in showers, level access showers and ground-floor toilets – we will help you to contact an occupational therapist who will visit your home and assess your needs.

We can also help you to obtain grant funding from your local council or another provider to pay for this work. Once we've talked to you about your needs, moving to a more suitable home might be better for you now, and in the future, as your needs change.

For more information, go to www.bcha.co.uk and download our guide to aids and adaptations.



Good luck Kelly

Everyone at Doveton House is sending their best wishes to care worker Kelly Bywater who has reached the finals of the Great British Care Awards.

Kelly won the Home Care Worker Award at the West Midlands Care Awards because of the high quality care and support she provides for the residents at Doveton House, a sheltered housing scheme in Stourbridge.

She now goes forward to the national awards and the winner will be announced in May. Good luck Kelly!

Doris celebrates her 100th birthday

Elizabeth House said a big happy birthday to Doris Cartwright in January as she celebrated her 100th birthday. Son John organised a party which was attended by relatives, friends and fellow residents.

Doris has lived at Elizabeth House for 20 years and has been very involved in its social life – she organised weekly coffee mornings and bi-weekly bingo evenings and other activities. She was also a founder member of the Elizabethan Magazine and looked after the garden with her friend for many years.

The sun shone on Doris's special day which will be long remembered by everyone who was there at the birthday celebration.

All change at Doveton House

Tenants at Doveton House have a warm glow in their homes – thanks to British Gas who fitted gas central heating in each of the 31 flats at the end of last year.

The old heating and hot water system was replaced and everyone agreed that there was surprisingly little inconvenience to tenants, staff and visitors.

The whole operation took from early September to mid December. Thanks to British Gas for "an excellent job" and for being so helpful.

How will the benefit changes affect me?

Many tenants will be asking this question as changes to housing benefit start to take effect this month. From April 2011, the government is making changes and these will affect people in different ways. You can get more information from www.directgov.com or your local authority's website.

Many of the things being talked about are not due to come in until 2013, but there are some important changes which will happen in 2011.

These changes are likely to mean that the amount of housing benefit you get will reduce if you have other adults living with you who are not your partner (these are sometimes referred to as non dependants).

Local authorities will write to everyone who might be affected personally.

You can also contact your housing officer with any queries.





Energy-saving ideas for your spring clean-up

Here are some tips on how to bring spring into your home and save money on your energy bills. One minute fixes to weekend DIY projects – they will all help to get your home ready for spring and summer and they will cut your energy use all year round.

Get light and warmth for less

- Let the sunshine in – cleaning windows and pulling back curtains during the day will help you take in more natural light and warmth from the sun. When you do need the lights on, save money by installing energy saving light bulbs.
- Adjust your heating controls – make sure your central heating is set for warmer weather, or switch it off all together.
- Give your loft a makeover – clear out those dusty old boxes and add loft insulation instead. It could save you around £205 per year if there isn't any loft insulation there already.

Spruce up your kitchen appliances

- Defrost your fridge and freezer for greater energy efficiency
- De-scale your kettle so it can boil water more quickly
- Clean your oven door – you'll be able to check on food without opening the oven and letting heat out

Get your garden in shape

- Improve your outdoor lighting – for quick savings, switch to energy-efficient light bulbs. You can also buy solar-powered garden lights that use no mains electricity and so don't generate carbon dioxide (CO2).
- Start composting – get your plants blooming with free fertiliser by composting food scraps, paper, cardboard and even the dust and dirt from your vacuum cleaner. If you don't have a garden, get a kitchen composter.
- Set up a water butt – collect rainwater to use for washing your car or watering your plants.

Spring clean your lifestyle

- Leave the car at home – by walking and cycling more you can save energy and enjoy the warm weather. The extra exercise will also help you get in trim for a summer day out or holiday.
- Clear out your wardrobe. When you find summer clothes that have fallen out of fashion or no longer fit, don't throw them out. Head to a recycling bank or charity shop, or throw a clothes swap party with your friends.

For more information on all of these quick tips, visit: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk



So what's new?

Black Country Housing Group strives to provide an excellent service to all of its customers. We have consulted with you in a number of ways over the past months so that we can shape our services to meet your local priorities. Our offer to you covers four key areas:

1. Customer Service
2. Home
3. Neighbourhood and Community
4. Involvement & Empowerment

As a resident you also have responsibilities. These are set out in your tenancy agreement.

1. Customer Service

To ensure we understand and respond to the diverse needs of our customers, we will:

- Treat all customers fairly and with respect
- Communicate with you by your preferred method, including using an interpreting service if English is not your first language
- Assist customers in need of minor aids and adaptations to their homes, and where more complex adaptations are required, help gain access to appropriate funding
- Return phone messages within one working day and reply to correspondence within five working days
- Welcome your comments, complaints, and compliments, and learn from them

2. Home

To ensure we provide quality accommodation and an excellent repairs and maintenance service, we will:

- Ensure that emergency repairs are completed within 24 hours, urgent repairs within 7 days and routine repairs within 28 days, and at a time convenient to you (where possible)
- Make sure appointments made for repairs to your home are kept
- Achieve high levels of customer satisfaction in relation to quality of work
- Make sure that when we offer you a property we provide you with details of the terms and conditions of your tenancy, information about your home and information about local amenities
- Make sure our properties meet the agreed standard when let and provide a copy of this to you
- Send you a quarterly rent statement and write to you each year about any changes in the amount of rent you have to pay

3. Neighbourhood and Community

We are committed to ensuring our neighbourhoods are clean, tidy and a place where people choose to live. Therefore, we will:

- Invite you to attend estate inspections and work with you to make sure that your estate is clean, safe and secure
- Maintain high quality cleaning and grounds maintenance services
- Provide service charge details and works specifications to you once a year
- Investigate all reported incidents of anti-social behaviour or nuisance
- Work with you and appropriate partnerships such as the police, local authority and voluntary groups to help tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour
- Respond to all reports of harassment and domestic violence within 24 hours

4. Involvement & Empowerment

We want to make sure our tenants have a wide range of opportunities to get involved as well as being involved in monitoring our performance. We will:

- Take your views into account and provide different ways and opportunities for you to participate and influence our services
- Attend and support local tenant and community meetings
- Work with the Tenants' Editorial Panel to produce quarterly informative tenant newsletters
- Seek tenants' views using a variety of methods including surveys and customer focus groups and feed back results into improvement plans
- Give tenants the opportunity to scrutinise our performance by establishing and supporting a tenant scrutiny panel

How you will know if we have met our standards

To ensure that our service meets the standards set out in 'Our offer to you', we will:

- Analyse all comments, complaints and compliments
- Obtain your views through satisfaction surveys
- Undertake mystery shopping through an independent auditor to test the service

Your views will help us to improve our service to you. So that you know what all of our customers have said about us, we will:

- Publish our performance results on our website and in the tenants' magazine every quarter
- Produce an annual report and send a copy to you
- Report the conclusions of the Tenants' Scrutiny Panel to the Group's Board every year
- Report annually to the Group's Board the conclusions of the Tenants' Scrutiny Panel

Sunday roast for £2 per head

Here's a great budget recipe you can cook in three easy steps and it's ideal for spring. You should have most of the ingredients already at home in a store cup3board. Enjoy!

Ingredients

6 boneless chicken breasts with skins, 1 small red onion cut into 8 wedges, 500g floury potatoes e.g. King Edward scrubbed and cut into wedges, 1 large lemon, 6 cloves garlic, 2 tsp clear honey, 1½ tbsp olive oil, Salt and pepper, 1 tsp fresh thyme and 6 sprigs fresh rosemary

Method

Step 1

Using a non-stick frying pan, dry fry the chicken breasts, skin-side down for 2-3 minutes until browned. Place in a large roasting tin with the onion and potato wedges.

Step 2

Remove the zest from the lemon and cut in half. Cut one half into wedges and add to the pan with 4 whole cloves of garlic. Squeeze the juice from the other half of lemon and mix with the zest, honey, oil and remaining crushed garlic. Pour over the chicken, season well and add the herbs.

Step 3

Bake for 1 hour or until the potato wedges are tender and the chicken is cooked throughout. Serve immediately from the roasting tin.

Quick tip

If really short of time, use either ready prepared frozen or chilled potato wedges. If using frozen potato wedges reduce the cooking time to 45-50 minutes or until the chicken is cooked throughout.

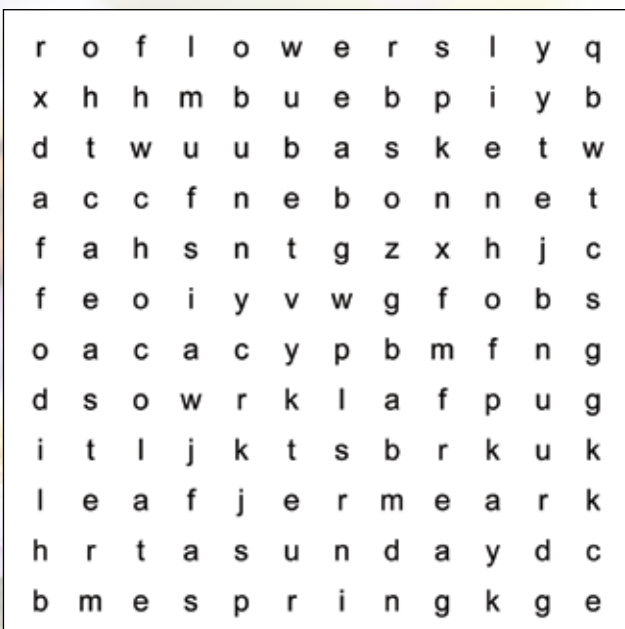
Money-saver

Save money by using chicken thighs and drumsticks instead of pricier breasts.

Here are some really useful links to tasty budget recipes:

www.jamieoliver.com/recipes/favourites/budget-recipes www.goodtoknow.co.uk/recipes/Cheap-family
www.lovepotatoes.co.uk/recipes/budget-meal-planner/

Kids Easter Word Search COMPETITION



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> easter | <input type="checkbox"/> bonnet | <input type="checkbox"/> flowers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sunday | <input type="checkbox"/> spring | <input type="checkbox"/> daffodil |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bunny | <input type="checkbox"/> chicks | <input type="checkbox"/> chocolate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> egg | <input type="checkbox"/> parade | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> basket | <input type="checkbox"/> hunt | |



Stambermill House, Lye



Braeburn House, Walsall

Do you, or someone you know need to downsize?

We have 3 properties available in our sheltered housing schemes.

There is a 1 bedroom ground floor flat, suitable for 1 or 2 people, available at Braeburn House, Yew Tree Estate, Walsall.

Braeburn House is a Sheltered scheme for over 55's

In addition there are 2 studio apartments available at Stambermill House, 104 Cemetery Road, Lye.

This too is classed as a Sheltered scheme but we accept applications from those who are 40 and over.

If you are interested and would like to know more about the schemes and their facilities, the rent and service charge, please contact our Letting team on 0121 561 1969.

Winner receives a £10 book Token!

Please cut out and send your entry to Black Country Housing Group Ltd, 134 High Street, Blackheath, West Midlands B65 0EE
 Telephone: 0121 561 1969 E-mail: housing@bcha.co.uk