

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page 2

Bogus Callers

Page 3

Clifton Park
Sparkles

Page 4

Home Insurance

Page 5

Aids & Adaptations

Page 6

Are you paying too
much for Gas/
Electricity?

Page 7

Gas & Electricity
cont/d...
Service Standards

Page 8

Respect our
Neighbourhood

Page 9

Performance
Review

Page 10 & 11

Our Repairs &
Maintenance Day

Page 12

Rent Increases



The **TSA** is the new regulator for homes owned by housing associations (such as Venture Housing) and co-ops.

The first thing the TSA needs to do is draw up a brand new set of standards for all social landlords. These standards are very important, as the TSA will be monitoring how landlords do in achieving them – and taking action against any who don't.

Having your say

The TSA has been listening to tenants across England through a process called:

**the national
conversation**

This '**conversation**' is one of the biggest tenant consultations ever and was designed to help them understand what you want to see in the new standards.

Over 50 Venture Housing customers recently took part in **Local Conversations** in sheltered schemes, at our offices and at the Kuumba Imanni Centre in Princes Rd Liverpool.

The groups put forward their views on some key questions including:

what is excellent service

what choices do you have (and what choices do you want) and

what is a good landlord

The feedback has been sent straight to the TSA and will be considered along with comments from housing association tenants from across the UK.

The TSA will be publishing what they were told and what they think needs doing to make sure the standards fit with what tenants want. In the summer the TSA are planning to talk again to tenants about how the standards are developed.

In the late summer they will publish a formal consultation about their plan and by Christmas 2009 the plan will be put into action. We'll keep you informed, so visit our website at www.vha.org.uk for regular updates.

Thank you to everyone who took part and made sure that the local needs and views of Venture tenants are considered nationally!

Beware Bogus Callers

Recently a bogus caller pretending to be the supervisor of a Venture electrician called to one of our tenant's homes after the electrician had left to carry out a 'spot check' on our electrician's work. Access was allowed and an item was stolen. It seems the perpetrator spotted the Venture van outside and used this as an excuse to enter the property.

Bogus callers pretend to be officials from Venture, the council, engineers from gas, electricity or water companies, police officers or salespersons in order to gain access to people's homes and steal money or property. They may carry fake identity cards and can seem very convincing.

How do I protect myself from bogus callers?

If someone calls round at your home, it's best to take precautions:

- Before you open the door check to see who it is by looking through your front window or by using a door viewer if you have one.
- Always lock the back door before opening the front door.
- Put the chain on the door before answering it. In flats it is not always possible to have a chain fitted as it may cause a fire hazard. Please contact the Repairs Line on 0151 261 2199 to discuss the security options available.
- All Venture employees and officers from the Police, Gas, Electricity and Water companies have identification badges. Please ensure you ask to see this before letting people into your home.
- If you are in any doubt at all suggest that the caller come back later. You can then check their story by telephoning the organisation or company they claim they represent.
- Check any phone number they give you in your own telephone directory. Do not rely on the number on their card.
- Ask a neighbour or friend to come round while the caller is there.

When booking a repair with Venture you can agree a unique password. Whenever our contractor visits your home, they will give the password. This will protect you against bogus callers pretending to be from Venture.

If you are disabled, have a chronic illness, hearing or visual impairment or are of retirement age, you can join the free priority services register. As part of this service, you can give your gas and electricity suppliers a password to be used by anyone they send round to your home. All you need to do is ask your gas or electricity supplier. You can find their telephone number on your latest bill, if you are unsure about doing this, you may wish to ask a friend to speak to the supplier on your behalf—either way your suppliers are obliged by law to help you.

How can I help my neighbours?

Bogus callers tend to prey on elderly and vulnerable people who live alone. If you are concerned that any of your neighbours may become a victim of bogus callers, let them know that they can ask you for help if they're not sure about the identity of callers.

How do I report bogus callers?

If bogus callers visit you or any of your neighbours, you should call the police straight away. You can find the number of your local station in the phone book or at the police website. You can also contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

REMEMBER !



STOP

Check your back door (if you have one), lock it and take the key with you.



CHAIN

Put your chain or door bar on - it is a useful barrier while you identify who they are.



CHECK

Check their details before you let them into your house.

CLIFTON PARK SPARKLES

On Wednesday 8th April Venture will lead a clean-up event in the Clifton Park area of Birkenhead.

We've been working with the **Tenants and Residents Association** to resolve problems with anti social behaviour in the area. Having had some success in resolving these issues the group has now started to look at other issues important to them.

The look of the area was a key issue so we've organised a clean-up day when we'll be:

Providing skips at key locations for residents to dispose of bulky items responsibly

Litter picking to clear main streets and roads and hope they stay that way

Knocking on doors of our vulnerable tenants to see if they need any help or support

Walkabout with Wirral anti social behaviour unit to identify problem hotspots

Parking the RESPECT bus in Clifton Park with activities for young people

If you'd like to get involved, or would like more information about what's happening on the day, give Margaret Dickinson a call on **0151 261 2100**.

Alternatively, if you don't live in Clifton Park but would like Venture to help clean up your area give us a call on **0151 261 2100** and we'll work with your local community to organise your very own Sparkles event.



HOME INSURANCE

‘Of those living in affordable housing, only 50% insure their home contents’

Tenant damage cost Venture £2,200 last year. As a result we have less to spend in services for our other tenants. Venture charges tenants for repairs which are due to wilful damage, neglect, misuse or abuse by the tenant, their family or visitors to the property for example a broken window*, these are known as 'rechargeable repairs'. The purpose of charging tenants for repairs is to ensure that tenants who conduct their tenancy in an appropriate way do not pay for damage done by others. Venture will not charge tenants if the damage has been caused by fair wear and tear or because damage is due to the age of the property.

Venture advises all our residents when signing for their tenancy that they should have personal home contents insurance to cover accidental damage, theft, fire, burst pipes and other household risks. Venture promotes the National Housing Federation My Home Contents Insurance Scheme to residents as an affordable way to insure the contents of their homes.

For example, if a family suffered severe water damage in their home due to a burst pipe, Venture would repair the burst pipe and damage to plastering but without home contents insurance the family would not have been able to replace their carpets, furniture and personal possessions or even redecorate their home.

Advantages of My Home Contents Insurance:

- Designed specifically for Housing Association tenants.
- Flexible regular pay as you go payment options by cash. Also direct debit, cheque, postal order, credit/debit card payment options available.
- Realistic sums insured available.
- No excess (You don't pay for the first part of your claim)
- Covers theft, water damage, fire and other household risks.
- Covers damage to internal decorations.
- Covers accidental damage to sanitary fixtures such as toilets and washbasins.
- Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible.
- Covers lost or stolen keys and freezer contents.
- You don't need to have special door or window locks.

How much does it cost ?

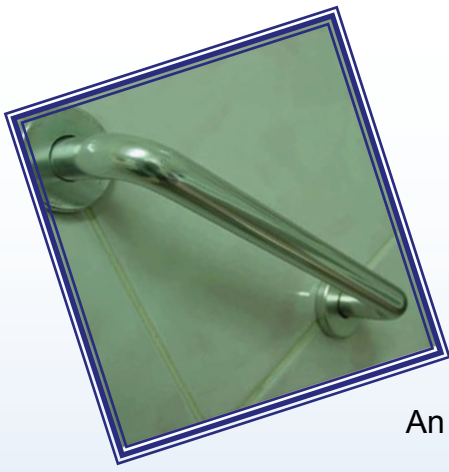
For example, a sum insured of £10,000, where the applicant is aged under 60 and choosing to pay by cash fortnightly the premium would be £2.59.

For an applicant over 60 years of age the premium would be £2.32 a fortnight for a sum insured of £10,000.

How to apply?

If you would like to receive an information pack which includes an easy to complete an application form or if you would like to arrange cover now please call **0845 337 2463** or pick up an information pack from your local Venture office.

AIDS & ADAPTATIONS



An adaptation is a change to your home to help you manage normal daily activities such as climbing stairs or washing yourself. Venture may adapt your home to help you live independently.

An adaptation may be a **minor** alteration to your home for example:

- Grab rails
- Stair rails
- Lever taps
- Flashing door bell
- Loop line

You can request a minor adaptation by calling the Repairs Line on **0151 261 2199**. We will contact you within 10 working days to let you know that a contractor has been appointed and that your adaptation will be done within 28 days.

An adaptation may also be a **major** piece of specialist equipment that alters the structure of your home, for example:

- Walk-in shower
- Hoise
- Stairlift
- Outside ramp

If you feel you would benefit from this type of help,. The first think to do is ask your doctor or occupational therapist to write to us and explain the kind of home aid or adaptation you need.

Once we have this information we will:

- Assess your needs and decide whether we can do the work and if Social Services need to be involved
- Explain our decision and outline what happens next
- Arrange a mutually convenient time for the work to begin, or agree to review your needs again at a future date.

For more information on aids and adaptations, please call **0151 261 2100**, lines are open Monday to Friday 9am—5pm.

If you call our helpline outside of these hours a trained operator will offer advice and take a message which will be passed onto the Venture team on the next working day.



ARE YOU PAYING TOO MUCH FOR YOUR GAS / ELECTRICITY?



There are essentially four main ways to pay for gas/electricity:

- Direct debit, managing your account on-line
- Direct debit, but still getting paper bills
- Standard credit, paying by cash or cheque every quarter
- Pre-payment meter, paying in advance by topping up a card or a key

People who pay for their gas and electricity using a pre-payment meter are stuck in a part of the energy market which is devoid of competition. Hence, they frequently suffer the highest prices and worst service. Pre-payment is, almost without exception the most expensive payment method and can cost you up to an extra £300/£400 per year. Should you prefer to use a pre-pay for your energy, there are other ways to pre-pay. Fuel Direct is a 'safety net' against disconnection for recipients of qualifying benefits as the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) pay the bills direct from a consumer's benefit. All major energy companies have an obligation to accept payment from Fuel Direct. This can be a good way of paying your bills without having a pre-payment meter installed.

Fixed or Capped Price Deals

Fixed and capped price deals are not usually available to pre-payment meter users. A capped price tariff offers the guarantee that the price of gas/electricity will not rise above the 'cap' for a set period of time. However, once the 'capped' price expires, the customer will usually be moved onto the suppliers standard price tariff, which might not be the cheapest on offer from the supplier.

Changing the way you pay

Consumers can save money by changing the way they pay for gas/electricity. Direct debit is usually the cheapest and pre-payment meter is usually the most expensive. Many suppliers have special tariffs and reward schemes such as; reward & cashback schemes, tariffs for older people, internet tariffs, green tariffs, prompt pay schemes. To find out more about these schemes, contact your suppliers or check out a comparison website such as www.saveonyourbills.co.uk

Changing your supplier

Another way of saving money is to consider changing your supplier. Changing supplier is a simple process which can be done over the phone in one short phone call. To do this you should get in touch with the new supplier of your choice. The new supplier will organise everything. All you will need to do is take the meter reading on the day you change suppliers

EBICO is a not-for-profit energy supplier that currently charges the same rate no matter how its customers pay. This means that pre-payment customers could potentially save £300/£400 per year by switching to EBICO. For more information on EBICO tariffs go to www.ebico.co.uk

Priority Service Register

The Priority Service register (PSR) can assist some vulnerable consumers by ensuring their energy supplier provides a suite of free services that improve safety, security and communication. To qualify for the register, one or more of the following must apply to you.

- You are of pensionable age
- You have a disability
- You are chronically sick
- You have a visual/hearing disability



Each energy supplier has a different name for their Priority Service Register

British Gas	-	Home Energy Care Register 0800 955 5404
EDF Energy	-	Priority Services Register 0800 269 450
E. ON	-	Priority Services Register 0800 096 3080
NPower	-	Warm Responsive Service 0808 172 6999
Scottish Power	-	Carefree Priority Service 0800 269 450
Scottish Hydro	-	
Southern Electric	-	Careline 0800 622 838
SWALEC	-	

Some companies also offer reduced price tariffs to people who are 'fuel poor'. Eligibility is usually conditional on the customer being in receipt of one or more welfare benefits, or being over a certain age. Further up to date information about social tariffs can be found on the new consumer focus website: www.consumerfocus.org.uk

SERVICE STANDARDS

A new set of service standards, developed with tenants is now available for tenants on our website at www.vha.org.uk. If you don't have access to the internet and would like a copy of our service standards please call on **0151 261 2100** and we'll deliver a copy to your home.

Key standards include:

- how quickly we respond to your repair requests
- answering telephones within 10 seconds
- measuring your satisfaction with how we deal with repairs, rents and anti social behaviour
- answering letters and e-mails within 10 working days
- how well we deal with any complaints you may have

If you'd like to help us to monitor our performance against these standards there are a variety of ways you can do this:

- become a Mystery Shopper or a Tenant Inspector (we will pay you for your time)
- get involved in the tenants panel (we will pay you for each survey you fill in)
- join your local tenants and residents association

call us on **0151 261 2100** and we'll be happy to take you through the options and find one that fits your needs.

**Kensington and Fairfield
'Respect Our Neighbourhood'
Week of Action Feedback Information**

13th to 19th October 2008



Give respect Get respect

This week of action will add to the excellent work already being undertaken in your area

This is a 'snapshot' of some of the outcomes from the recent 'Respect Week of Action' in your area

**'Kensington and Fairfield 'Respect Our Neighbourhood'
Week of Action—Some Key Outcomes**

SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Policing Operations:

- 73 arrests
- 90 Fixed Penalty Notices issued
- 220 residents received crime prevention advice
- 1897 passengers checked and 38 prosecutions for fare evasion and forged tickets

Environmental problems tackled:

- 33 tonnes of rubbish removed
- 30 reports of graffiti/fly tipping responded to

HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE

- 33 people attended healthier life-styles awareness events

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 198 young people took part in local activities
- 'Your Choice' Young Person's Conference. 140 pupils benefited from a day of 'interactive workshops' exploring issues such as citizenship and learning about the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE

- 170 community members attended Job Fairs with local employers
- 69 referrals to JET (Jobs, Education and Employment) and other employment programmes
- A fortnightly Job Café held at Venture Housing

Performance Review

Venture Housing is dedicated to improving the services we deliver to our customers so we check our performance in key areas against other landlords, as well as how we are doing against the targets set by our own organisation. Here we show you how we are doing in some target areas such as rent charges, lettings and customer satisfaction.

Average weekly rent

We aim to have competitive rents and provide the best value for money for our customers.

Average rents	Community Seven	CDS Housing	Cobalt Housing Trust	Liverpool Housing	Venture Housing
1 bed	£54.03	£58.87	£57.17	£61.59	£50.08
2 bed	£62.09	£64.86	£63.20	£62.64	£61.53
3 bed	£66.28	£69.04	£61.20	£67.45	£70.19
4 bed +	£68.47	£79.42	£70.95	£72.80	£75.46

Vacant properties and lettings

Vacant properties may be ready to let to a new tenant (available) or unavailable because they need major repair or renovation work. It is taking Venture a little longer than average to re-let empty properties but those vacant and ready to let are small in number.

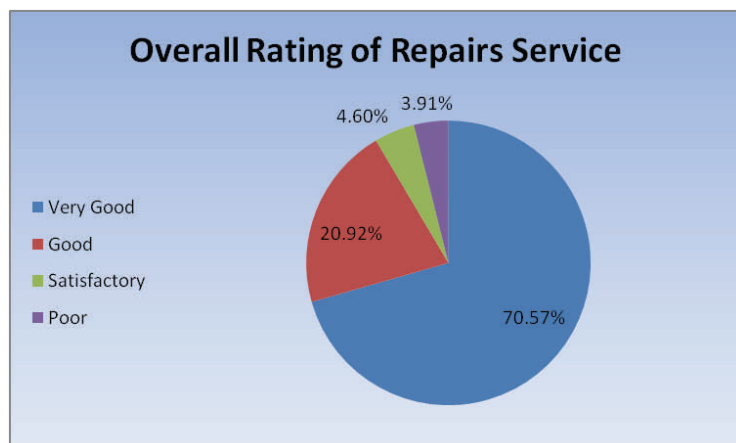
	Community Seven	Riverside Group target	National Average	Venture Housing
Average re-let turn-around time (days)	52.8 days	43 days	40 days	39.4 days
% of homes vacant and available to let	0.5%	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%
% of homes vacant and not available to let	23.1%	3.8%	1.2%	3.27%

Resident satisfaction

Our continuous repairs survey suggests Venture customers feel that we keep them well informed and the repairs service is as good as the national average.

	Community Seven	Riverside Group target	National Average	Venture Housing
Residents satisfied with the overall service	70%	77%	79%	88%
Residents satisfied with the repairs service	70%	77%	79%	91.5%
Rates 'good/fairly good' at keeping tenants informed	70%	77%	79%	89.2%

Residents satisfaction with our repairs service



Responsive repairs

Venture has exceeded the national average for all housing associations.

	Venture 2008/09	National Average
Emergency repairs completed within target 24 hours	97.65%	92.7%
Urgent repairs completed within target time (three working days)	92.98%	92.7%
Routine repairs completed within 15 working days	94.82%	93.7%

Percentage of all routine repairs completed within target time 94.68%

	Community Seven	CDS Housing	Cobalt Housing	Liverpool Housing	Venture Housing
Routine repairs completed within target	94.5%	97.5%	90.0%	95.2%	94.8%

Our Repairs & Maintenance Day

Thank you to all those who attended our Repairs and Maintenance Day on 2nd February 2009 or filled in a Repairs and Maintenance survey, the event was a great success. We received over 200 responses and the information you provided will be used to develop our 5 year plan. This plan will tell you when you can expect improvements (such as a new kitchen) to be made to your home.



From the information you provided we know that the following are our customer's top 5 improvement priorities:

New kitchen

New UPVC windows and new front and back doors

New bathroom

Upgrading central heating systems (replacing Economy 7 or providing a new boiler)

Electrical upgrades

We will now use this information to plan improvements to our properties for the next 5 years starting with new kitchens. As Venture only has limited resources we will need to prioritise how we spend our repairs budget. With your help we decided the best way to prioritise improvements was on the age and condition of item and on economies of scale. This means we get better value for money and our repairs budget will go further if we fit 100 windows all in one go than 1 window here and there.

Other improvements which you felt were important were:

You said	We did
Install showers in bathrooms	As part of the bathroom improvement process all properties will be fitted with an over bath shower. We aim to have this completed by December 2019
Improve fencing, boundary walls and gates	Will we now include fencing, boundary wall and gate improvements within the 5 year plan
Improve intercom system	As part of the 5 year plan all flats will have an intercom. We aim to have this completed by December 2014
Improve security such as CCTV and security lights	We will now provide security lights to our properties. We aim to have this completed by December 2019. We will investigate other security issues such as CCTV and see what we can do to improve it
Improve sound proofing between floors in flats	We will investigate this problem and see what we can do to improve it
Improve energy efficiency with insulation, boiler jackets, solar panels and wind turbines	We aim to make our homes more energy efficient with double glazing in all properties as part of the 5 year plan, a minimum of 250mm of loft insulation, energy efficiency lighting communal hallways by December 2014 and to kitchen, hall and living rooms of individual homes by December 2019. We will investigate the possibility of installing solar panels and wind turbines
Private letterboxes for flats	We will include this as part of our 5 year plan

We aim to have our 5 Year Plan finished by May 2009 when we will hold another consultation day to hear your views. If you feel you mentioned something as part of the Repairs and Maintenance event which was not taken into consideration please contact Siofra Boyd on 0151 261 2100 or siofra.boyd@ventureha.co.uk.

Rent Increases

A number of tenants have been in touch to ask why their rent has gone up when things are so difficult with the economy. We thought a short explanation might help you to understand.

In 2003, the Government decided that all social landlords (such as housing associations and councils) needed to work out their rent charges in the same way. They called this process rent re-structuring or rent convergence. Because of this your annual rent increase is set using a formula which considers:

- average manual wages in the area
- property values in the area
- the number of bedrooms in your home

The idea was that, over time, two tenants living in similar properties in the same area should be paying the same rent, whether the landlord is a housing association or a council.

Local earnings: the local earnings part of the formula compares the average manual wage in Liverpool and Wirral with wages elsewhere in the country.

Property values: the council in your area were asked to value properties for this purpose. But it's not possible for the council to value each property individually. So they identify typical properties (called 'beacons') within each area and these have been valued by local surveyors.

These beacon homes are then used to give a value to every other property that is of the same size, type and location. All properties have been valued at 1999 prices.

Number of bedrooms: the number of bedrooms in your home is also used to calculate the rent. The more bedrooms there are, the more the rent will be.

What will happen to rent because of this policy?

Taken together these elements make up a **target rent** for your home. This target rent increases each year.

If the target rent for your home is higher than your current rent you will see an annual increase until the target rent is reached. Some rents will increase by more than inflation, others will increase by less than inflation but the Government has stated that no-one's rent will increase by more than:

- the inflation rate in September of the previous year
- + ½%
- + £2 per week

We have to reach the target rent on all of our homes by 2012. While this doesn't make things any easier we hope this explanation makes it easier to understand why we've acted as we have.

IF YOU NEED THIS NEWSLETTER IN ANOTHER FORMAT (E.G., AUDIO CASSETTE / LARGE TYPE / BRAILLE) OR IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE, PLEASE TELEPHONE 0151 261 2100.

如果您需要这份简讯的其它版式(如:
录音磁带/大字版/盲文)
或者其它语言版本, 请致电
0151 261 2100

Si necesita este boletín en otro formato (por ej. casete de audio / caracteres grandes / Braille) o en otro idioma, por favor llame al 0151 261 2100

اگر آپ کو یہ نیوز لیٹر کسی دوسری صورت (مثلاً آڈیو کیسٹ پر ریکارڈ شدہ / جلی حروف / بریل لکھائی) یا کسی دوسری زبان میں درکار ہو تو براہ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 0151 261 2100 پر فون کریں

Si vous voulez cette lettre d'information sous un autre format (sur cassette audio / en gros caractères / en braille) ou dans une autre langue, veuillez appeler le 0151 261 2100

Jeśli chciałbyś otrzymać tą ulotkę w innym formacie (np. jako kasetę dźwiękową / tekst napisany dużą trzcionką / w języku Braila) albo w innym języku, zadzwoń pod numer telefonu: 0151 261 2100

Se precisar deste boletim informativo num outro formato (e.g. cassette audio / tipo grande / Braille) ou em outra língua, por favor telefone para o seguinte número 0151 261 2100

Ukoliko vam je potrebna ova brošura u drugačijem formatu (na primer na audio kaseti / napisana krupnim slovima / Brajevom azbukom) ili vam je potrebno da bude prevedena na drugi jezik, pozovite sledeći broj telefona 0151 261 2100