

SEVEN LOCKS



HOUSING





# NEWS

November 2008

Issue 1



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**Strong Foundations, Stronger Communities...**

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## Dear readers

We've looked closely at how we communicate with tenants and, after speaking to a number of you, we have decided to launch an exciting new look customer magazine.

We hope you enjoy reading "Seven Locks Housing News" and find it packed full of useful information and advice. We'll address topical issues, keep you up to date on improvements to the housing service and the progress of the investment programme.

Transfer signalled a number of changes in the way we work and we hope you are noticing the new service improvements we have introduced. However, we need your help to make it a success.

We'll be providing plenty of opportunities for you to have a much greater involvement in the way we deliver our services, so please keep an eye out and get involved.

*Deborah Bennett, Executive Director*

## Seven Locks celebrate move

**Centenarian and customer with one of our longest serving tenancies, Ruth Chapman officially opened Seven Locks Housing's new offices and customer contact point in July.**

The move to Anson House was marked at the official opening when Mrs Chapman, who celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday that week, cut the ribbon at Anson House, Market Harborough.

Mrs Chapman signed her first tenancy with Market Harborough District Council on the 12 July 1932 and guests at the event were able to view a copy of her original tenancy agreement. The rent she paid 76 years ago was eight shillings, the equivalent of 40 pence today.

Deborah Bennett, Executive Director of Seven Locks Housing, said: "I'm delighted Mrs Chapman was able to join us on this important day in the history of Seven Locks Housing."



*Mrs Walker receiving the bouquet from Liz Brock Customer Service Advisor*

## First past the post

Mrs Sybil Walker of Kibworth was our first customer through the door on the day that we opened for business at Anson House. Mrs Walker was surprised and absolutely delighted to receive a bouquet of flowers to mark the occasion.



## It's good to talk

**Providing customers with an excellent level of customer service is a key priority for Seven Locks Housing.**

We are working hard to get things right first time and improve the services we provide for our customers. We have come a long way since transfer but we still have further improvements to make.

So far, we have recruited two new customer service advisors, trained all of our customer service staff to log and process repair requests and provided customer service training for all of our staff

However, this is just the start. We have introduced a new initiative which helps us to make sure that we are doing what we say we will.

In the future when you contact our main customer service number – 01858 414500 – or if you call our repairs freephone number – 0800 1300 365 – you may receive a courtesy call from us a few days later to see if you are satisfied with the service.

Your feedback, positive or negative, will be used to improve the housing service.

Here are just a few of the comments some of you have made when we called you back:



*Mrs Dorothy Partridge, of Billesdon, said: "I am very impressed that you have taken the time to follow up on the call I made."*

*Mr Raymond Patrick, of Market Harborough, added: "I am very happy with the standard of repair and the service delivered by Seven Locks Housing."*

*Finally Mr Hubert Simpkin, of Billesdon, said: "I like how you took the hard work out of my hands and my request was dealt with promptly."*

Jeakins Weir, who deliver our day-to-day repairs service, have also attended specialist customer service training, pictured above.




## Join us for our first customer conference

**Help Seven Locks Housing celebrate our first anniversary. Every customer is welcome to attend our first customer conference on Tuesday, 9 December.**

In our first year we have achieved a great deal, but we still have a long way to go. We want to share our achievements with you and set out our priorities for the year ahead.

Transport will be supplied and a crèche, complete with children's entertainer, will be provided on the day for customers with young children.

To help us shape the housing service we want you to come along and take part in one of our workshops. We want you to help to:

-  shape our grounds maintenance contract
-  make sure our financial inclusion package has something to offer all customers
-  shape our services to make sure they meet the needs of our customers with disabilities.

You can also find out how the local Credit Union works and what it offers in terms of affordable credit.

In November, every customer will receive an invitation to the customer conference but, for now, put the date in your diary.




# Help is at hand


Resident Liaison Officers (RLOs) are in place to help customers when improvements are being carried out.

The RLOs work for our main contractors Lovell and Connaught.


The RLOs' role is to keep you informed about the proposed works.

They will:

 guide you through the process make arrangements with you for the works to start

 provide assistance if you need help preparing your home for work, such as providing packing boxes and dust sheets

 keep you informed about day-to-day matters

 be your first point of contact when dealing with any problems or concerns recording the details and making sure they are dealt with.

You will receive a letter when work is due to start in your area. At this stage you will be allocated an RLO who will contact you to carry out an initial induction.

We understand that having a new kitchen or bathroom fitted can be a big upheaval but by working with your RLO we will work hard to keep disruption and inconvenience to a minimum.

If you have a support need, contact Michael Press, Seven Locks Housing's tenant liaison officer on 01858 414521.



*Karen Cheney and son in their new kitchen*

## Home improvements underway

**In April we started improving homes and we are now underway delivering our £35 million improvement programme.**

You will be informed when work is due to start in your area. Already we have fitted 285 bathrooms and 304 kitchens.

Surveyors will visit tenants to make sure improvements really do reflect your individual needs and choices. You will be given the opportunity to select the door finish, work surface, flooring and tiles from a range of quality materials.

The work will be carried out by our contractors, Lovell and Connaught.

This work is a big task and we will strive to keep disruption to a minimum and make sure that the work is completed to the highest possible standard.

Already the feedback we are receiving from customers is positive, with customer satisfaction at 92%. Here are just a few of the comments:

*"Very happy with all of the work and the workers."*

*"I was treated with the utmost respect. I am profoundly deaf and they (the workers) understood this. They kept me informed and, most of all, very satisfied."*

### MEET THE RLO'S



Jane Winter  
(Connaught)



Karen Langton  
(Connaught)



Debbie Vincent  
(Lovell)

# Review of the year

## Making a difference

**"Welcome to Seven Locks Housing's Review of the Year. We want to take this opportunity to share with you some of our highlights and performance facts and figures.**

The past 10 months have been both exciting and challenging. We are already having a positive impact, by improving local homes and introducing new services.

It is still early days for Seven Locks Housing but, with the support of the Acclaim Housing Group, we are confident that we are making a real difference to your quality of life.

Over the next couple of pages we would like to share with you some of the achievements we are particularly proud of.

We hope that you agree that the service improvements that we have introduced have had a positive impact on the housing service you receive.

I would like to join with Deborah Bennett, Executive Director of Seven Locks Housing, and our employees to thank our customers for your support in our early months.

We are all looking forward to an exciting future, delivering strong foundations and stronger communities."



*Judith Burdett,  
Chair of Seven Locks  
Housing's Board*

## The story so far...

**Seven Locks Housing was created on December 4, 2007, after tenants voted to transfer homes from Harborough District Council.**

As well as looking after the day-to-day maintenance of more than 2,000 homes, we have started a major £35 million improvement programme which will be carried out over the next five years. We are fully immersed in delivering the promises made to tenants.

Seven Locks Housing is part of the Acclaim Housing Group. The newly formed group was set up following the creation of Seven Locks Housing and has one other member, Dales Housing.

Dales Housing owns more than 3,000 homes in the Derbyshire Dales and was formed in March 2002.

Both housing associations are committed to providing a high quality housing service and providing homes in which tenants are proud to live.

The Acclaim Housing Group helps both Seven Locks Housing and Dales Housing provide high quality homes and excellent services for both existing and future customers, and a range of central support, including human resources, finance and ICT.

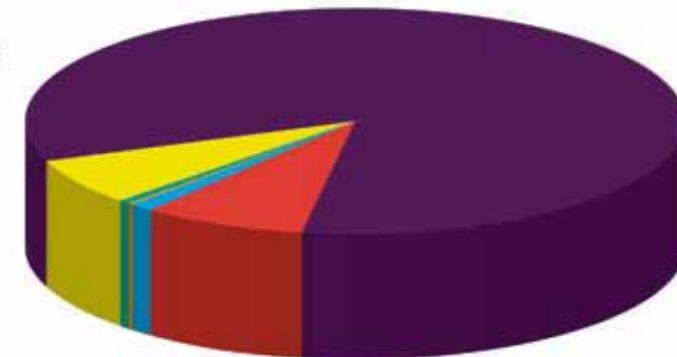
# Money, money, money

A key role of the Acclaim Housing Group is to oversee the finances of Seven Locks Housing and Dales Housing. However, each member company manages the collection of its income and spending at a local level.

## Acclaim Housing Group

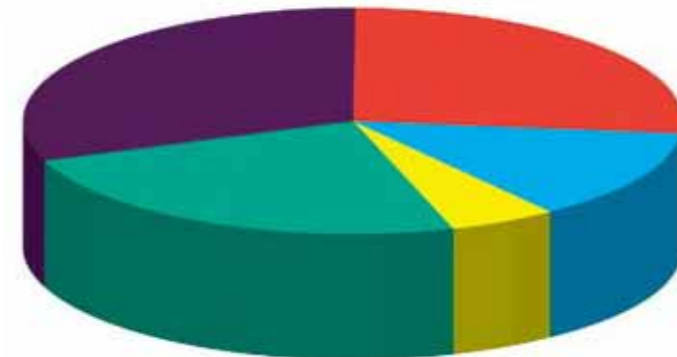
### Where the money comes from:

	£'000s
Rents	11,830
Service charges	1,180
Management and other services	129
Sales	64
Interest receivable	63
Loans	928
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,194</b>



### Where the money is spent:

	£'000s
Management costs	4,404
Routine maintenance	3,761
Major repairs	1,886
Bad debts and depreciation	720
Loan repayments	3,423
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,194</b>



Here are the latest figures, up until August, for how Seven Locks Housing has performed.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL
Repairs – Emergency – 24 hours	97%	100%
Repairs – Urgent – 7 days	97%	97.6%
Repairs – Routine – 31 days	97%	97.5%
Satisfaction with overall service	87%	83%
Average re-let time	5.7 weeks	7.69 weeks
Rent arrears	4%	3.28%
% of gas services completed	100%	100%

## Acclaim given the green light

Just two months after its launch the Acclaim Housing Group was given four green lights from its regulator, the Housing Corporation. The assessment is awarded in recognition of the way the organisation is governed and managed. It also highlights the strong foundations that have been established for the group.

# A successful transition

A lot of work has gone on behind the scenes to make sure that Seven Locks Housing was able to hit the ground running from day one of the transfer.

Not only did we successfully launch the new organisation but we also got straight down to business, improving the housing service you receive and starting improvements to homes.

Support and guidance from Acclaim Housing Group and Seven Locks Housing's Board has proved essential in these early months – working together to achieve set milestones.

### Key achievements include:



#### Building solid foundations:

a detailed business plan has been set up and a loan secured to fund the improvement programme to your homes.



#### Opening a new headquarters:

a new era for social housing in the district was marked when staff moved to our new offices and customer service point at Anson House in July. The new office, opposite the leisure and health centre, is the administrative hub and is open to customers. It is easy to get to with customer parking and is served by the regular X7 bus service. The office is open from 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday.



**Establishing a customer services team:** a new customer services team is now in place. Our aim is to make sure that we meet your needs with all of the services that we provide.



**Appointing our contractors:** Customers played a key part in the selection of our contractors. Lovell and Connaught have been appointed to deliver the first five year improvement programme. They are already working in a number of homes.



**Starting work:** work has already begun to improve homes, services and communities.




# Delivering promises to tenants


Although Seven Locks Housing is less than a year old, we have already begun to make a difference and deliver many of the promises made to tenants before transfer.


Change on the ground is starting to become visible, as the home improvement programme is rolled out, and a range of fresh, customer-focused initiatives are introduced.

**Achievements from recent months include:**


 **Modernising homes:** the £35 million investment programme for homes began at the end of April. This will see new bathrooms fitted to 1,300 homes and new kitchens fitted to 1,600 in the first five years. In the first four months, Seven Locks Housing completed improvements to 377 homes.

Frances Gray is just one of many tenants who are enjoying the benefits of a modernised home. Frances, who lives in Market Harborough, said: "I'm extremely pleased with my new kitchen and bathroom – it will make such a difference. Having the work done was quite an upheaval, but the end result has made it all worthwhile."


 **Building new homes:** prior to transfer, we promised to build 60 new affordable homes in the first five years. A programme to deliver 36 of these is already underway, seven have been completed and families have moved in.

 **Better services:** a range of new customer-focused services have been launched, including:

- a freephone hotline for repairs – 0800 1300 365
- a new customer newsletter, and suite of information leaflets
- the introduction of All Pay – providing local outlets for you to pay your rent across the district
- customer service training for every member of staff

 **Tenant involvement:** customers are being given as many opportunities as possible to influence the way the housing service is delivered. Through consultation events and dedicated groups, all customers are invited and encouraged to get involved in the development and delivery of services.

Work is underway to provide a new improved tenant resource centre which will provide a meeting space and training facility for our tenant groups.

 **Improving the environment:** Work is underway to provide off street parking which not only solves customers' parking problems but enhances the environment too. Additional funding has also been provided to improve the layout of estates so that customers feel more safe and secure.



Frances Gray in her new kitchen

# 7 Locks Housing Tenants Association

The latest news  
from 7Locks  
Housing Tenants'  
Association



## Check mate

**In a winning move Stan Parsons is the newly elected Chair of 7Locks Housing Tenants' Association.**

Stan spent a number of years living in Canada before he retired and moved to Dunton Bassett, where he is very active in community life.

When he is not attending tenants' association business, Stan is one of a band of volunteers who dedicate their time teaching chess to young people.

Stan said: "I'm really looking forward to my time as Chair. I hope I can rise to the challenge as well as the youngsters do when I teach them chess."

**For more information on the chess club please contact Paul on 07515 550724 or visit: [www.paul.chess-in-schools.com](http://www.paul.chess-in-schools.com)**

## Look out for the pennies

**This is a time for difficult decisions as the festive season approaches.**

We all look forward to the holidays. However, in the current economic climate we have to be careful with our finances to make sure we have enough money left in January and February to pay the bills.

The banks may be in a pickle but it doesn't mean you have to be too. However, if you find that you are struggling to pay your rent, Seven Locks Housing is here to help.

If you find yourself having difficulty paying your rent because of illness, redundancy or you are struggling to make ends meet please contact your housing manager as soon as possible.

## Do you know a community hero?

If you know of someone who gives something back to their community or you have an event you would like the tenants' association to report on in the next newsletter. Please contact Tracey Silk, Tenant Participation Officer, on 01858 414519.

## Big thank you

A big thank you to all of the tenants who turned out for our Annual General Meeting on 4 September.

It demonstrates that transfer to our new landlord and getting involved has sparked your interest, as over 50 of you attended. We would like to encourage as many of you as possible to get involved.



## Goodbye Janice

**Janice Cuplin has retired from her role as Chair of 7Locks Housing Tenants' Association.**

She enjoyed a rewarding time as chair, working closely with the Council and Seven Locks to make sure that tenants got the best deal from transfer.

Janice's hard work was recognised in a presentation from Seven Locks Housing and the tenants' association in early October.

She said: "I have really enjoyed my time as Chair."



## Decent bathrooms

Seven Locks Housing is committed to making sure that all of our customers have a decent bathroom that they can use whatever their disability or mobility need.

Some of our customers who live in a property designated for older people (sheltered flats, bungalows or ground floor flats) have difficulty using baths. Some have to resort to using communal shower facilities in sheltered schemes.

We have promised these customers that if their home is included in the 1,300 identified as needing a new bathroom they will be offered the choice of a walk in shower when we are carrying out the improvement to their home.

However, not all of our older customers with mobility needs or who have to use communal showers are included in the 1,300 bathroom improvements identified in our first five year programme.

To address this problem these customers can apply to have a walk in shower. We will then arrange for an assessment by our own Occupational Therapist.

If this assessment confirms the need for a walk in level access shower, and our qualifying customer wants one; Seven Locks Housing will provide one.

## New and easy ways to pay

Since April Seven Locks Housing has been offering new and easy ways to pay your rent and encouraging customers to use one of the following payment methods:

### Through your bank by:



To set up a Direct Debit contact our Rents Team on 01858 414507/8. Your rent can be collected from your bank account on a weekly, fortnightly, four weekly or monthly basis. Once set up you do not need to do anything else.

### Standing Order

You can set this up through your bank and pay you rent on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Contact the Rents Team to request a Standing Order form.

Since April every customer has been issued with a plastic rent payment card which has a unique rent reference number on it that must be used with the following choice of payment methods.

### Pay by cash, cheque, debit or credit card

At any Post Office®, PayPoint or Woolworths



You can use these outlets free of charge to make a payment anywhere in the country.

Just make sure you keep your receipt as proof of payment.

To find your nearest outlet go to [www.paypoint.co.uk](http://www.paypoint.co.uk) or contact our Rents Team for advice.

### Using a debit/credit card only:

#### By Telephone

We accept payments over the telephone, please call Allpay on 08702436040.

#### By Text

We accept payments by mobile phone text messaging, visit [www.allpayments.net](http://www.allpayments.net) to set this up.

#### Internet

By visiting [www.allpayments.net](http://www.allpayments.net)

**Ann Ball, Head of Operations at Seven Locks Housing, said: "Following transfer the Council kindly enabled our customers who hadn't yet chosen one of the new payment options to continue to pay rent at their offices on a temporary basis.**

**"However, this transitional arrangement is now coming to an end. From 1 January 2009 the Council will no longer accept rent payments at Adam and Eve Street or at the Lutterworth Service Shop. However, you will still be able to pop in and pay your Council Tax."**

**If you would like some help choosing which payment option will work best for you, please contact our Rents Team on 01858 414507.**

## Fun day held as improvement to homes is completed

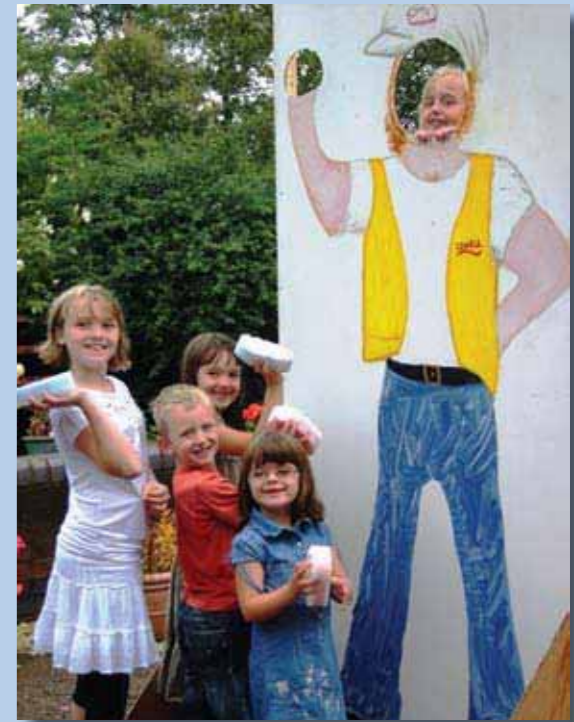
SHELTERED housing tenants celebrated the completion of a programme of improvements to their homes with a special fun day.

Friends and family gathered at Arkwright House in Broughton Astley on Saturday, 6 September, as proud residents showed off the improvements, which included 31 new kitchens, 29 new level access bathrooms and improvements to the communal kitchen facilities.

The work, carried out by Lovell, got underway in June, and Arkwright House is the first sheltered scheme to be completed.

Deborah Bennett, Executive Director for Seven Locks Housing, said: "We've really hit the ground running since transfer. The money we are investing in homes is already having a positive impact."

Lovell and Seven Locks Housing joined forces to organise the fun day to thank the tenants for being so understanding while work was being carried out. Various stalls were organised and a "throw the sponge at the builder" competition went down a storm.



## Disability action group

### Volunteers are needed to join our Disability Action Group!

Seven Locks Housing is committed to making sure that our policies, procedures and the way we work meets the needs of our customers with disabilities.

To help us achieve this we are calling for any of our customers who have a disability to become part of our Disability Action Group. By volunteering you will be able to have your say and influence the way we do things.

**If you are interested or would like more information on joining the voluntary group, please contact Tracey Silk, Tenant Participation Officer, on 01858 414519.**

*Seven Locks Housing were out and about over the summer talking to customers.*



## 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations

*A landmark birthday – Seven Locks Housing presented a bouquet of flowers to Mrs Calvert of Morrison Court on her 100th birthday.*



# Tell us what you think

Now you have read the first edition we want to hear what you think. Please complete this short survey and return to Deborah Floody, Customer Relation Manager at Seven Locks Housing. Alternatively, you can email your views to [Deborah.floody@sevenlockshousing.co.uk](mailto:Deborah.floody@sevenlockshousing.co.uk)

**What do you think of Seven Locks Housing News?**

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**If you can please provide us with a positive comment about the newsletter?**

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**If you can please provide us with a negative comment about the newsletter?**

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**Do you have any other comments:**

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## COMPETITION TIME

Did you spot the poppy? Complete our comments form and return by 30th November, telling us where the poppy is hiding. The first correct entry drawn will win a £20 Argos voucher.



# How to contact us

## Seven Locks Housing

1A Anson House, 8 Compass Point,  
Northampton Road, Market Harborough,  
Leicestershire LE16 9HW

## Customer Contact Point

Opening times – Monday to Friday  
9am – 5pm

**Telephone: Customer Services**  
**01858 414500**

Email: [info@sevenlockshousing.co.uk](mailto:info@sevenlockshousing.co.uk)  
Web: [www.sevenlockshousing.co.uk](http://www.sevenlockshousing.co.uk)

## Repairs freephone 0800 1300 365

No matter what time you call to report a repair, even if it is out of hours, please call the repairs freephone number

Seven Locks Housing holds surgeries at Lutterworth Service Shop every week for customers. You can make an appointment to see your housing manager or drop in to discuss any housing issues on: Monday and Thursday from 9.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm.



## Equality and Diversity Statement

- This document is also available in other languages, large print and audio format upon request. Contact Customer Services on **01858 414 500**
- આ દસ્તાવેજ વિનંતી કરવાથી બીજી ભાષાઓ, મોટા છાપેલા અક્ષરો અથવા ઓડિઓ રચનામાં પણ મળી રહેશે.
- अनुरोध पर यह दस्तावेज़ अन्य भाषाओं में, बड़े अक्षरों की छपाई और सुनने वाले माध्यम पर भी उपलब्ध है
- Dokument ten jest na życzenie udostępniany także w innych wersjach językowych, w wdużym druku lub w formie audio.
- ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਅਤੇ ਆਡੀਓ ਟੇਪ 'ਤੇ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਹੋਇਆ ਵੀ ਮੰਗ ਕੇ ਲਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ।
- Anson House has hearing loop systems in reception, interview rooms and the Boardroom and a minicom service.