

my GREAT PLACE

Spring 2016

The magazine for Great Places
Housing Group residents

A step forward for Hannah sees her community spring ahead

Longridge resident Hannah Newton on learning to walk again and volunteering in her local community.



Community funding
££ up for grabs for you and your community!



Spring events
Free fun activities for you and your family



Flood alert
What you can do to protect your home

Numbers you need to know

Email our Customer Access Team: cat@greatplaces.org.uk

Phone our Customer Access Team from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.
It's local rate. Call us on: **0300 123 1966**

or simply text us on: **07797 870 734**

Repairs

For all Great Places residents you can call us between 8am and 6pm weekdays on:

0300 123 1966
& press 1 for repairs

You can also use this number for out-of-hours emergencies.

Or you can email us about a repair at repairs@greatplaces.org.uk



Office addresses

Blackburn office

Barnfield House (Suite 4 and 5)
Groundfloor, Accrington Road
Blackburn BB1 3NY

Open Monday, 9.30am-5pm
& **Thursday 9:30am-12:30pm**

Appointment only at all other times.

Cheshire office

106 Longridge, Knutsford, WA16 8PD

Opening hours:
Monday only, 9.30am to 4.30pm

Fylde office

336 Talbot Road, Blackpool,
FY1 3QU

Opening hours: Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Great Places head office

Southern Gate, 729 Princess Road,
Manchester M20 2LT

Opening hours: Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Oldham office

119 Union Street, Oldham OL1 1TE

Opening hours: Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Salford office

4th Floor, St James's House,
Pendleton Way, Salford M6 5FW

Opening hours: Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Sheffield office

The Quadrant, 99 Parkway
Avenue, Sheffield SS9 4WG

Opening hours: Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Write to My Great Place at:

Communications
Great Places
Southern Gate
729 Princess Road
Manchester M20 2LT

Email:

communications@greatplaces.org.uk



Find us on Facebook at
facebook.com/GreatPlacesHousing



Tweet us @MyGreatPlace

Access for all

We've already sent a magnifying sheet to our visually impaired residents. Let us know if you need one. An audio version of My Great Place is also available.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



FSC AND WORLD LAND
TRUST LOGOS



Cover star:
Knutsford resident
Hannah Newton

Spring has sprung and our communities are alive with activity! Take a look at pages 4–5 for what’s being going on in our neighbourhoods and pages 10–11 for fun activities that are coming up over the next few weeks.

We’ve also got some handy garden tips to help your green spaces bloom this spring/summer (pages 14–15).

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Knutsford’s shining star Hannah Newton who reminds us that

anything is possible if we commit ourselves to achieving something and are open to accepting support to help us along the way (pages 12–13). I trust you will enjoy reading about her journey.

Kirsty

Kirsty Hogarth, Editor



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Hannah Newton cover star

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Maintaining our green spaces

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Tenants and Residents' Association (TARA) Meetings

TARA committee meetings (for residents of Richmond Park, Birklands and Athelstan) take place on the first Monday of each month from 10am–12pm at the Community Centre on Richmond Park Drive.

TARA is always keen to welcome new members and to hear new ideas and suggestions, so please get involved by joining us for one of our meetings this spring.

Spring into spring with one of these activities

Chairobics – Mondays – 2pm–3pm

Sewing group – Wednesdays – 9:30am–2:30pm

Over 50s Club – Wednesdays – 2pm–4pm

Great Places customer drop-in surgery – Thursdays – 9am–12pm

Where: Richmond Park and Birklands Residents' Community Centre, Richmond Park Drive.

Sessions are open to all residents of Richmond Park, Birklands and Athelstan Close. All ages and abilities are catered for.



IT whizz launches new business

On page six of the Winter 2015 My Great Place we featured a story about Great Places resident Arshad Ayub, based in Salford, who has set up his own business providing IT services as well as website and app design. If you are interested in seeking his help you can contact him on 0161 792 7683 or 0792 919 0067.

Wybourn community grant up for grabs

If you've got an idea for a community event, activity or project that could benefit people in Wybourn and you would like to apply for a grant please contact Philip Walker on 07854 430 293 or email philip.walker@greatplaces.org.uk.



Community cook off!

Oldham residents pop on their pinnies for a Cook Eat Talk session to look at ways they can lead a healthier lifestyle. They are joined by Afruj Chandhury and Anna Kennedy from Safeguard Fusion Training (centre).



Hip hip hooray!

Mrs Ada Harries from Middleton – pictured here with Great Places' repairs field manager Kevin Waterworth – is celebrating after Great Places recently installed a new wet room in her bungalow. Mrs Harries, who will soon be turning 90 years old, was struggling to get in and out of her bath after undergoing a hip operation. To speak to Great Places about an aids and adaptation matter, please contact our Repairs Team (see page 2 for contact details).



Scarecrows make a splash at Tatton

The children of Longridge and Shaw Heath had a splashing day out in their wellies to see their Roald Dahl scarecrow creations on display at Tatton Park. The children designed the scarecrows with the help from the staff at Tatton Park over three-weeks.



Northmoor residents, student volunteers and Great Places staff take a pride stride through their community to get it looking spick n' span.

Spring clean up!

What: Northmoor spring clean (refreshments and equipment provided)

Where: Northmoor Hatton/Hopkins/Rushford Street alley way

When: Wednesday 13 April, 12:30–3:30pm

What: Westwood spring clean up (refreshments and equipment provided)

Where: Yasmin Gardens, Westwood

When: Thursday 7 April, 11am–1pm

Does your area need tidying up? Great Places can support you to clean up your neighbourhood. Please contact our CAT team (please see contact details on page 2).



The slow cooker tasting session and prize draw was a big winner with residents (pictured: Bowland House resident Joyce Powell).

Residents 'bowled over' by savings on energy bills

Residents from Bowland House and surrounding homes in Blackburn enjoyed a winter warmth party, hosted by Great Places and AgeUK, and were pleasantly surprised to learn about all the ways they could save money on their energy bills.

If you'd like advice or help with reducing your energy bills please contact our CAT team (see page 2 for contact details).



A trip down memory lane

The Creation of a Community exhibition, which has been on display at the Welcome Café and Knutsford Heritage Centre over the last couple of months, has been a hit with the local community.

The project, which is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, celebrates the changing face of Longridge and Shaw Heath – with a range of historical photos, maps and stories from the local area.

For more information see www.creationofacommunity.com.

Funding to boost neighbourhood appeal

You can help decide which customer and community projects receive funding — please see page 9 for details.

David Pomfret, neighbourhood manager for Fylde Coast and Lianne Horrocks of Clevedon Road.

The **Residents' Fund** and **Shared Spaces** Fund provide a pot of money to help the people, places and projects in your community to shine.

Whether you'd like to set up a social or sports club, gain a qualification to boost your career, or improve a shared space for you and your neighbours – Great Places can help.

Clevedon Road in Blackpool has a fresh new look in time for spring thanks to Great Places' Shared Spaces Fund.

Anjum Saleem, Great Places' stock condition surveyor and Andrea Lawton, Great Places' neighbourhood coordinator, were successful in their bid for Shared Spaces funding to improve the condition and safety of the areas at the front of several properties on Clevedon Road.

Improvements include the removal of the bollards to improve safety, unsightly weeds have been treated, step tiles replaced, and new handrails installed. The front parking area has also been re-tarmacked in red to distinguish it from the black walkways.

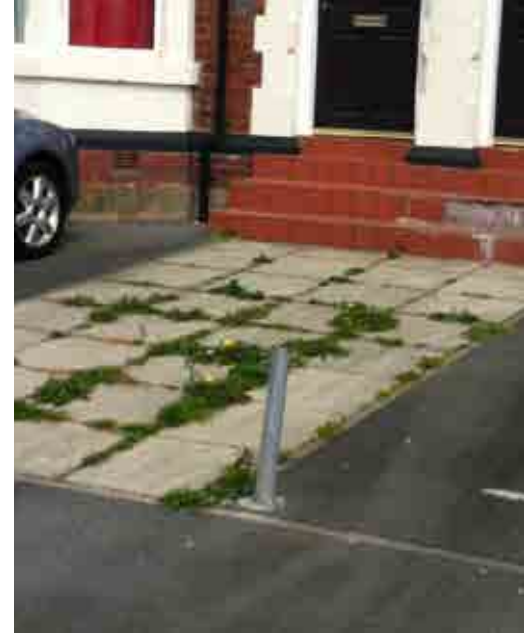
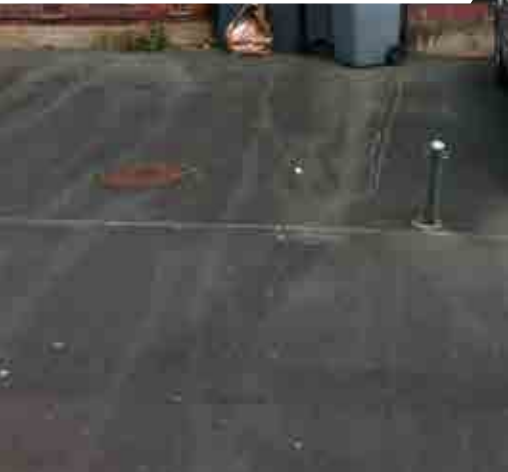
A single Eurobin in a purpose-built timber bin store has replaced numerous unsightly wheelie bins at the front of the properties improving 'kerb appeal' and helping to reduce fly tipping and littering.

Lianne Horrocks has lived on Clevedon Road for 12 years and is delighted with the results.

She said: "I was glad to see the bollards go – the AA had to come out when a friend's car caught one once. The new tiles are also great. The old ones got slippery when it was wet.

"My neighbour is disabled so the handrails are a big help. The work has made a huge difference."

Before...



After...



Great Places Residents' Fund update!



17

Resident Fund applications assessed by the panel

16

Resident Fund applications approved

£19k

Total funds given out

We've got **£25,000** to award for projects that help:

- To support employment
- To build sustainable neighbourhoods
- To promote health and wellbeing

You can apply via any of the following ways:

- Calling **0300 123 1966**
- Emailing maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk
- Visiting www.greatplaces.org.uk and searching for 'Great Places Residents' Fund'. Opens April 1st, Closes June 30th, September 30th, December 31st.

Great Places Shared Spaces Fund update!



21

Shared Spaces Fund applications received

21

Shared Spaces Fund applications approved

£102k

Total funds given out

We've got **£125,000** to award for projects that help:

- To increase safety and security of shared spaces
- To improve the appearance and usability of shared spaces

To put forward an idea/suggestion for Shared Spaces funding, please contact the Great Places customer access team on **0300 123 1966** or email cat@greatplaces.org.uk.

Shared Spaces funding: Opens April 1st, Closes 31 December 31st.

Matt's message



It is important that you, our customers, can have your say in the way we deliver our services to you. As a business we are looking to get more of you involved in this. We are looking to move away from people having to come to an office and instead find different ways for you to give your views, whether that is over the phone, via email or even social media. As part of our new approach it means the Customer Service Voice (CSV) group recently met for the last time. I would like to thank CSV for their hard work. We look forward to working with them through other customer involvement activities.

One thing I need to mention is home contents insurance. That is something you have to provide yourself, so for example if

your house flooded as some of our homes did during Christmas, then you would have to pay for the damage to items like your television, carpets and fridge. We've teamed up with insurance company Aviva to provide a discounted scheme. You can find out more details on p18.

Finally, I am looking forward to our Community Stars Awards ceremony. I have had the pleasure of reading some of the nominations which are truly inspirational. Look out for the photographs from the event in the next edition of My Great Place and on our Facebook page.

Matt



We stand together

Our Customer Involvement Team celebrate how 'different but equal' makes for successful teams and communities!

If you've got a photo to share celebrating how your neighbours or community stands together please Tweet @MyGreatPlace and use the hashtag #WeStandTogether. Our fave pics will feature in the next issue of My Great Place!

It's vantastic!

Great Places have given their van and car fleet a 'vantastic' new look! There are four different types of vehicles specifically designed to make sure that our repairs staff have the right tools on-hand to allow them to complete more jobs on the first visit to a customer's home.

Photographed is Colin Manion, our repairs field manager.



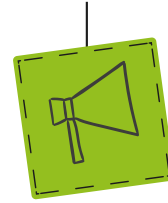
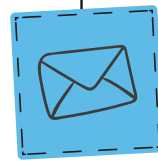
Community Star Awards - record result!

Your nominations are now in and a panel of judges have been sifting through them to select the winners.

Thanks to everyone who nominated – we've received a record number of nominations this year!

The shortlisted people will attend an awards ceremony on the 9 April 2016 where the winners will be announced.

We'll be featuring a full list of the winners on our website, Facebook and in the summer issue of My Great Place.

Improving how we communicate with you

Our customer scrutiny group ‘insight’ has recently looked at the way Great Places communicates with customers through our customer newsletter (My Great Place), the website, the customer annual report and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

As part of the review, insight wanted to understand if customers find Great Places’ communication easy to access and helpful. They consulted with over 200 customers, interviewed 10 Great Places’ officers, looked at our communications strategy and researched what other companies do.

insight will soon present its report to the Great Places Board and is confident that its recommendations will further improve how Great Places communicates with its customers in the future.

You can find insight’s report on the Great Places website under the heading ‘where you live’.

If you are interested in reviewing Great Places’ services (either part time or full time) and you’d like to contribute or learn new skills please contact Maria Morris on 0161 447 5076 or email maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk.

Help our communities to flourish!

Great Places Residents’ Fund and Shared Spaces Fund provide a pot of money to help support individual customers to achieve a specific goal and to help both new and longstanding community projects to grow.

By taking part in the Great Places Funding Panel you’ll play an important role in deciding which customer and community applications are approved to receive funding from Great Places.

Funding Panel members are provided with training so that they can review and score applications from the comfort of their own home – either online or by post.

If you would like to find out more about getting involved please contact Maria Morris on 0161 447 5076 or email maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk.

Working with you to improve our repairs service

Customers help us to check the standard of our repairs work by providing feedback on their experience with the service (such as logging a repair, being allocated an appointment and the way that the work is carried out in their home).

Great Places regularly selects a sample of customers who have reported a repair to see if they would like to ‘mystery

shop’ our repairs service but you can also volunteer to take part.

If you are having a repair completed and would like to provide feedback on your experience you can complete a feedback form, which can be found on our website under the heading ‘where you live’, or contact Maria Morris on 0161 447 5076 or email maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk.

How well do we handle customer calls?

We want your views! As the saying goes ‘you never get a second chance to make a first impression’ and this is the reason our team of volunteers audit the way Great Places handles calls with its customers.

Auditors listen to calls made to our two customer contact centers (Customer Access Team and our Repairs Team) to check that the way we handle customer calls is up to standard.

If you are someone who likes to make a difference then joining our team of 13 auditors may well be for you (plus, you can do it from the comfort of your own home!).

For further information please contact Maria Morris on 0161 447 5076 or email maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk.

NEWS BOARD

Your homes in safe hands

100% of our homes across the north west and Yorkshire have been checked over the last twelve months to ensure that they're gas safe.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in providing us with access to your home to complete these important checks each year.



Career support is just a click away

No matter your age, experience or location, if you're keen to find a job or training opportunity then Great Places can help!



Over the last year we've helped:

- 110 people into a job
- 135 people into training
- 90 people into voluntary opportunities



And we can help you too! My Work Search is one of the great online tools we use to help support you with finding the perfect career opportunity www.mwstechnology.com.

It provides free career training and advice – from interview tips and how to complete a career application to finding the perfect job for you and how to build your confidence.

If you'd like help with signing up to My Work Search or general support with kick-starting your career **please contact our CAT Team (see page 2 for contact details).**



Top CV Tips!

How long should my CV be?

No more than two pages long. Insert paragraph breaks/spaces between each section to make it easy to read.

How should I present my CV?

Print it on plain A4 white paper or if you are submitting an electronic document then a Word Document or PDF.

What writing style should I use?

Keep the writing clear and to the point so that it is easy to read and understand.

Do I need different CVs for different jobs?

You don't need to start your CV from scratch every time you apply for a new job but you may need to make some changes to ensure that your CV clearly demonstrates the skills and experience that are specifically relevant to the particular job you're applying for.

Can I stretch the truth on my CV?

There's a difference between selling yourself and inventing things!

For more career advice and tips visit nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk.





Know a cheat on your street?

What is tenancy fraud?

When somebody living in a Great Places home rents it to another person(s) without permission or obtains a home through providing false information, then they are guilty of tenancy fraud.

Tenancy fraud is a criminal offence, which an individual can be prosecuted for.

It's impact on the social housing community

With thousands of people on the housing register, it's very important that we make sure our homes are allocated in a fair manner.

All the money lost to fraud is money that could be spent on building more homes, improving neighbourhoods, and providing important support services to our customers.

What you can do to help

You can help by reporting any cases of suspected fraud to the **Great Places CAT team** (see page 2 for contact details) or email tenancyfraud@greatplaces.org.uk.

All the information you give to us will be treated in the strictest of confidence. You do not have to give your name or reveal any details about yourself if you wish to remain anonymous.

Put a spring in your step with these events

It's all about music and relaxation in our star events this spring/summer.

Oldham

What: Whit Friday band contest
When: 20 May
Where: Saddleworth villages
Cost: Free
More information:
www.whitfriday.brassbands.saddleworth.org

Blackpool

What: Meditation in the park
When: 22 May
Where: Stanley Park, West Park Drive, Blackpool
Cost: Free
More information:
01253 352 721

Blackburn

What: Darwen Live (a two-day free music festival)
When: 29 and 30 May
Where: Darwen Market Square
Cost: Free entry
More information:
01254 688 040

Salford

What: Winton Festival (as part of Armed Forces Day)
When: 25 June
Where: Winton Park
Cost: Free entry
More information:
0161 793 3432

Greater Manchester

What: Manchester Day Street Parade
When: 19 June
Where: Manchester city centre
Cost: Free
More information:
0871 222 8223

Sheffield

What: Open Up Sheffield (local artist and crafts fair)
When: 30 April to 2 May
Where: Locations across Sheffield
Cost: Free
More information:
www.openupsheffield.co.uk



WELCOME CAFE

**“Volunteering in
my community
gave me
something to
focus on.”**

A step forward for Hannah sees her community spring ahead

At 22-years-old, Longridge resident Hannah Newton has had to relearn to walk to twice after a brain condition affected her ability to move her legs and has seen her eyesight degenerate.

The football enthusiast has faced numerous other mental and physical health conditions since childhood, including substance abuse, and found her school years very challenging.

Despite this, her determination to fulfil her dreams has seen her transform her life by creating her own opportunities and helping others in her community.

Hannah successfully turned a casual kitchen-hand role at a local pub into a formal apprenticeship in hospitality and catering and has completed numerous personal development courses including a Community Leadership Course with the Youth Federation – which saw her run an alcohol, drug and mental health awareness programme for young people – and Great Places' Strong Women's Course. She also rolled up her sleeves and volunteered at Longridge's popular community hub, the Welcome Café.

"The neighbourhood team at Great Places encouraged me to do the six-week Strong Women's Course. I really didn't want to do it initially but I'm glad they persuaded me as it really helped with my self-esteem and confidence."

Hannah's determination to succeed in realising her goals saw her presented with a Youth Award last year from the Mayor of Knutsford, councillor Tony Dean.

Hannah now leads a popular youth group in her local community helping children, including those with complex needs, and has applied for a full-time paid job in health and social care.

"Volunteering in my community gave me something to focus on. I love working with children who have complex needs as I can relate to them and it feels very rewarding to be able to connect with and support them."

If you'd like help or advice about training and career opportunities, improving your wellbeing or managing your finances then Great Places can help. Please contact our Customer Access Team (see page 2 for contact details).



The Welcome Cafe team including Eleanor, Beryl, Hazel, Nathan and cover star Hannah Newton.

A new look gardening and grounds maintenance service

Great Places have made some changes to the grounds maintenance service tenants pay for, to ensure a good-quality service at a cost-effective price.

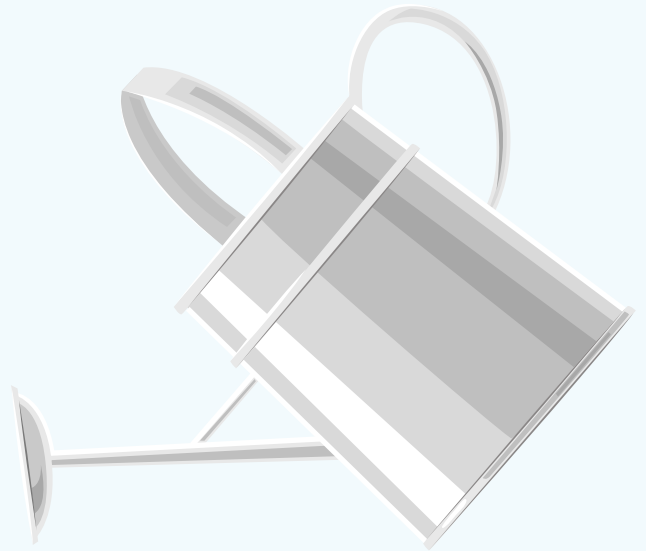
What you can expect from your new grounds maintenance service

Grass cutting, trimming hedges and litter picking around blocks of flats and communal areas are just some of the services tenants will receive. Tree maintenance is covered by a separate arrangement with another contractor.

Introducing our contractors — from 1 April 2016:



Meet Greenfingers – In Greater Manchester, Salford and Fylde, your contractor is Greenfingers. They have worked with Great Places for a number of years and by developing our relationship in the future we are confident their service provision will continue to go from strength-to-strength.



Meet SPA Landscaping – In South Yorkshire your new contractor is SPA Landscaping. They are a local Sheffield-based contractor with over 30 years' experience delivering a reliable and high-quality grounds maintenance service.



The new contractors will be easily recognisable — staff will wear uniforms and their vans have their logo on. Ask for identification if you are unsure and, contact Great Places if you have any concerns.

What your new contractor will do

How often they will do it

Weed any borders by hand

Three to four times per year

Cut the grass

16 times between March and November. Whenever the grass is cut the contractor will collect all of the grass cuttings

Edge the lawn with hand tools

Once a year

Trim the hedges

Two to three times per year

Weed the paths

Taller weeds will be removed by hand once or twice a year. Chemicals will be used carefully to remove smaller weeds

Prune any shrubs

Two to three times per year

Remove litter

Every visit

Remove any clippings and cuttings

Every visit



Have your say – If for any reason you have any concerns about the standard of work from your new contractor, please contact Great Places' **Customer Access Team** (please see page 2 for contact details).

Perfect your pruning techniques to care for your shrubs and trees – Hard pruning stimulates new shoot production when leafy growth is required. Light pruning stimulates bud development.

Remember: too little pruning is safer than too much. Collect all your prunings. Dispose of large branches or diseased prunings and compost them.

Remember to tend to your lawn between March and May

March: as soon as the grass grows and the weather permits, brush the lawn vigorously to remove wormcasts, then rake thoroughly. Two cuts should be sufficient during March – just top the grass first time to avoid it yellowing.

April: it's time for an application of fertiliser. Mow often and cut no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.

May: Continue mowing but lower the height of the cut and remove any weeds from the lawn.

Know the best times to sow: indoor and outdoor planting from seed

February to April: sow seeds indoors in pots or trays of seed compost. Keep the compost moist but not saturated.

April to May: sow seeds outdoors in flowering positions. Water plants if conditions are dry and feed with a fertiliser.

June to October: this is typically flowering time so keep your flower beds weed-free, feed your plants and dead-head flowers throughout the season.



Be a savvy water saver:

Leaving the tap running will use up to six litres of water per minute so your two minute brushing could waste up to 12 litres of water... money literally straight down the drain.

Get an economical loo! Great Places only fit dual-flush toilets with a split-flush button which use between four-six litres per flush compared to older systems which can use up to 13 litres per flush. If you have an older style toilet (pre 2001), please contact our CAT team (see page 2 for contact details) and we'll send you a water hippo. Super easy-to-install, it displaces about one litre of water with every flush.

Watch what you flush: Don't flush cotton balls or make-up tissues. They clog up the drains and you're using your water to flush them away. Chucking them in the bin costs nothing!

Put a full load in your dishwasher or washing machine:

Experiment with settings like 'eco' or 'economy' mode. Avoid pre-rinsing dishes – detergents are very effective so just scrape and load.

Put the plug in!

If you're washing up, put the plug in! The kitchen tap flow rate could be as much as 25 litres per minute!

Cook with care: Always use a lid for your saucepan to reduce the amount of water lost and the risk of condensation in the kitchen.

Don't overfill: Only fill the kettle with what's needed to save both water and energy.

Use leftovers: Don't forget your plants love a drink too, so feed them water leftover from your glass.

Tap water v bottled water: UK tap water is among the best in the world! It's also very cheap, working out about £1 per cubic meter. Bottled water undergoes fewer quality tests than UK tap water and the bottles are often made from plastic which leaks PET into the water which can cause bacterial build up if exposed to heat.

Make a difference on World Water Day – 22 March

Every year the United Nations raises awareness of the global water crisis on World Water Day. 650 million people around the world do not have access to safe, clean water. Discover more about this shocking water shortage by visiting www.wateraid.org.

In the UK we use 150 litres of water per day per person which we could cut by as much as a third! An increasing population, changing lifestyles and increasingly erratic weather patterns all put pressure on our water supply making it even more important to conserve water. A water meter could help reduce your usage and save you a lot of money.

Money Saving Water Schemes

If you live in a United Utilities (UU) area there are several schemes that could help you to reduce your water bill.

- Arrears allowance scheme – if you have water arrears and stick to a repayment plan UU will clear your arrears by £1 for every £1 you pay off.
- Help to Pay – if you or anyone in your house gets Pension Credit you can cap your water bill at £250 per year.

- Watersure – if you have a water meter and receive benefits, and you have 3 or more kids living at home or need to use a lot of water because of a medical condition you can cap your water bill at the local average.
- If you are a single person household it is best to have a water meter fitted. If you can't have a meter fitted you are entitled to cap your bill at £248.

For more information please contact CAT (see page 2 for details) or email fit@greatplaces.org.uk.

Protecting our communities

The community safety team work across Great Places neighbourhoods to tackle unacceptable behaviour. We work alongside our neighbourhood staff and other agencies to put you first.

What do we do?

We investigate incidents of:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Domestic abuse
- Hate Crime
- Crime and nuisance
- Neighbour issues

Safety first!

It's all about early intervention and prevention. We want to resolve issues and work with you. We know it's important to you that appropriate action is taken against those responsible. We work closely with the police and other agencies to reduce crime and nuisance in your neighbourhoods.

How to get help

We want you to feel comfortable about approaching us. We're a friendly team and we're here to help. We will listen without judging you, and offer advice. Our staff are fully trained and you will be treated with complete discretion. If you need the help of an interpreter we will arrange this for you.

If we visit you, we will always show an identity card and will respect your home, privacy, customs and culture. We will always show an identity card and will respect your home, privacy, customs and culture.



REPORT IT

To report anti social behaviour or community safety concern please email cat@greatplaces.org.uk or call **0300 123 1966** (and press option 4). The option 4 ASB line is open 24 hours including bank holidays and weekends.

Please only press option 4 if you are contacting us about an ASB matter.

For more information about community safety visit: www.greatplaces.org.uk and search for 'community safety'.



COULD YOU AFFORD TO REPLACE EVERYTHING IN YOUR HOME?

If the answer is no, then you can't afford to risk not having home contents insurance cover!

It's important that you protect your home against the risk of flooding, fires, burglaries and other incidents that can, and do, happen – otherwise you risk losing all your possessions.

The storms that have battered Britain in recent months and years have affected hundreds of thousands of households.

In the event of flooding Great Places will repair any damage to your building, but any contents including carpets, flooring, furniture, electrical items and other personal possessions are your responsibility to replace.

Home contents insurance just for you

Great Places request that all tenants take out a home contents insurance policy so we have teamed up with Aviva to offer you a great deal!

Our policy has no excess which means you don't pay anything if you need to make a claim, and Aviva have guaranteed that premiums will not increase over the next 3 years, even if your property is flooded.

There are lots of ways to pay and premiums start from just £1.68 per week for £9000 worth of cover.



Free Power Cut Support

If you live in the North West or Yorkshire and have additional health needs then the Priority Services Register is here to help.

It's a free service to help those who are most vulnerable to stay safe and comfortable in their own home in the event of a power cut. If you live in the North West contact **0800 195 4141** or visit **www.enwl.co.uk**. If you live in Yorkshire contact **0800 375 675** or visit **www.northernpowergrid.com**.

For further information about Great Places' contents insurance scheme please contact our Customer Access Team (see page 2 for contact details).

Housing Benefit – new backdating rules

The government has made changes to the backdating rules for claiming Housing Benefit.

From April 2016 the period for backdating Housing Benefit claims will reduce from 6 months to just 1 month.

This change will only be applied to people of working age.

Housing Benefit will continue to be backdated for three months for claimants of Pension Credit age (or if your partner is Pension Credit age).

If someone fails to request the backdate when they make their new claim for Housing Benefit, and this isn't spotted for a month or more, even if they had good cause for why they did not claim earlier, they will not be able to get their claim for Housing Benefit backdated at all.

Are you prepared for Universal Credit?

Universal Credit lumps all major benefits together into one monthly payment.

Over the next few years more people will move off the old benefit system and onto Universal Credit (UC), so here are our top tips for making sure you are prepared!

Save! – If you come out of work and have to claim UC you will not get any money for around 7 weeks! That's a long time to go without anything to live off.

Learn how to budget – Your rent money will be included in your UC payment, so you will get a large lump sum each month and will need to budget accordingly.

Open a 'clean' bank account – Are you always in overdraft or do you get charged for going overdrawn? If so, it would be a good idea to open a new bank account so your money doesn't get swallowed up.

Get connected – All UC claims will be made online and in the future all information from the Jobcentre will be online, so you will need an email address and access to the Internet.



Christine Jones, who lives in Rochdale and works part time at a football museum, was struggling to pay the bills and so she got help from Great Places' Financial Inclusion Team.

“They helped me to apply for Universal Credit and gave me advice about other in-work benefits that I can apply for. I'd like to say a big thanks to Great Places for their help.”

Pictured: Christine Jones with our financial support coordinator Rebecca Cremin.

Fee-free bank accounts

Have you ever been hit with bank charges? Have you been refused a bank account in the past?

Nine high street banks are now offering an account to people that have struggled with banking in the past. These new accounts allow you to have money paid in, withdraw cash, pay bills by Direct Debit and buy stuff on-line, all without the fear of being charged.

If you already have a bank account but would like to move to a fee free one you can contact your bank and ask to switch.

The banks offering these new accounts are:

Barclays – Barclays Basic Current Account, **The Co-operative Bank** – Cashminder, **HSBC** – Basic Bank Account, **Lloyds Banking Group** (Bank of Scotland, Halifax and Lloyds) – Basic Account, **National Australia Bank Group** (including Clydesdale Bank and Yorkshire Bank) – Readycash Account, **Nationwide** – FlexBasic, **RBS Group** (NatWest, Royal Bank of Scotland and Ulster Bank) – Foundation Account and Basic Account (England and Wales), **Santander** – Basic Current Account, **TSB** – Cash Account.

Working together to improve our services

Towards the end of 2015, Great Places staff came out to every scheme to talk to residents about the services that they receive; what works well, what doesn't work so well and how we could improve our services further.

The aim was to make sure that our services meet your needs and are also suitable for future customers.

We have created an action plan to address those issues and concerns raised by customers that can be fixed fairly quickly. This action plan has now been displayed on all scheme noticeboards and will also be discussed at upcoming residents' meetings.

We are now also working on addressing the bigger, slightly more complex matters and will provide an update on how this is progressing in the next issue of Grapevine.

Some examples of how we've addressed your feedback:

You said: "We would like the scheme manager to be on site more and attend less meetings. We are not sure when they are on site."

Great Places' feedback: Your scheme manager is generally on site Monday to Friday during office hours. They are required to attend a range of off-site activities such as team meetings, health and safety meetings and training. Where they are likely to be off-site for any significant length of time they will communicate this via the scheme notice board.

You said: "What is the remit of the caretaker?"

Great Places' feedback: "This is subject to review. The elderly service managers/scheme managers of the extra care schemes will be working with the caretakers to ensure that their remit is clear and will communicate this to residents in due course."

Elderly services – meet the team

Fylde Coast

Claire Dobson, Elderly Services Manager

Scheme

Scheme manager

St George Court

Selbourne Road,
Blackpool, FY1 3RX

Andrea Herring

01253 300891/07929 651 355
andrea.herring@greatplaces.org.uk

Windmill House

Millfield Road, Blackpool,
FY4 5PE

Lois Brownsword

01253 839001/07875 733 767
lois.brownsword@greatplaces.org.uk

Douglas Leatham House

Threlfall Road, Blackpool,
FY1 6NN

Julie Barnes

01253 406721/07929 651 555
julie.barnes@greatplaces.org.uk

The Willows/ Lilac Grove

Juniper Close, Preesall,
Poulton-Le-Fylde, FY6 0QJ

Alison Harrison

01253 812155/07917 527 344
alison.harrison@greatplaces.org.uk

Tulloch Court

Cherry Tree Road,
Blackpool, FY4 4QL

Deborah Hutchinson (Temp)

01253 607940/07786 631 983
deborah.hutchinson@greatplaces.org.uk

Elk View Court

Ashfield Road, Blackpool,
FY2 0AF

Ron Taylor

01253 359100/07581 569 818
ron.taylor@greatplaces.org.uk

Salford and Manchester

Sarah Phethean, Elderly Services Manager

Scheme

Scheme manager

Openshaw Court and Ramsden Fold

Off Bolton Rd, Swinton,
M27 8FE

Katrina Shilvock

0161 7940801
katrina@shilvock@greatplaces.org.uk

Hawkshaw Court and Stanyard Court

Off Howard Street,
Salford,
M5 4SD

Hazel Southgate

0161 872 7693
hazel.southgate@greatplaces.org.uk

John Atkinson Court

Tootal Rd, Weaste,
Salford,
M5 5FY

Gareth Gibson

0161 7372502/07767644393
gareth.gibson@greatplaces.org.uk

The Byrons

Higher Blackley,
Manchester,
M9 8LT

Kathryn Tiller

0161 7959168/07786110732
kathryn.tiller@greatplaces.org.uk

Helping to keep you warm for less

Our winter warmer event at Openshaw Court in Salford, which was funded through the Big Energy Saving Network, was a real hit with residents.

The afternoon included lively entertainment, good food and top tips for saving money, keeping warm and staying safe during the winter months.

Great Places' Environmental Team offered residents with free home energy checks and our Financial Inclusion Team provided advice about switching utility plans to save money.

Helpful advice and tips were also offered by the local police, Cyril Flint befriending service, and Age UK.



Blackley in Bloom



Congratulations to the residents of The Byrons in Blackley, including Peter Matthews, Deborah Morris and Ollie Murphy, who were the green-fingered leaders in preparing their communal garden for a Gold Award in the Blackley In Bloom competition.

Pictured: Byron resident Peter Matthews (pictured with his wife, Eileen Matthews) was successful in securing £10,000 from the National Lottery Fund to spend on their communal garden.



HOW WE'RE DOING

Customer care

We strive to provide you with the best possible services and customer care; however, we understand that sometimes we get things wrong. When things go wrong we really want you to let us know so that we can not only put things right but also learn from your experience and ensure the same situation doesn't occur again.

Making a complaint

You can inform us by any method (telephone, email, in person or by post – see page 2 for contact details). One of our frontline staff will initially try to resolve your issue. We call this 'nipping in the bud' (NIP) and staff have five working days to identify the best possible course of action to put things right.

If you are not satisfied with how we propose to put things right you have the option of requesting your issue is looked at in more detail by one of our service managers. They will then investigate your issue, discuss why you are unhappy with our initial offer to put things right and provide you with a final, formal offer to put things right. We call this process 'right first time' (RFT). We aim to resolve your complaint within 15 working days.

If you are still unhappy with our response you have the option of referring your complaint for independent

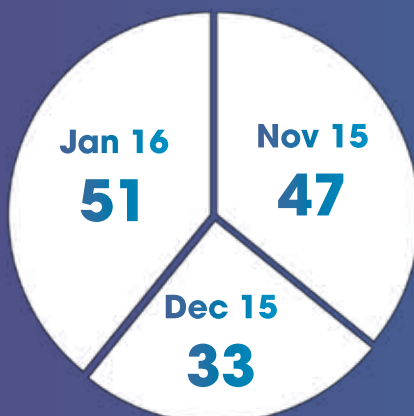
resolution. This independent resolution could be any of the following:

- A local councillor
- An MP
- The Housing Ombudsman

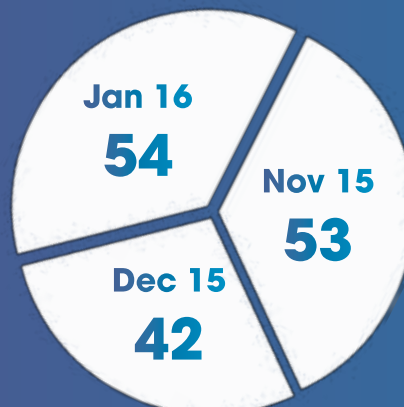
What we've learnt from recent complaints

- New surveys have been introduced prior to investment work starting in customers' homes to provide better clarity on what's involved. Photographs will also be taken before the work starts.
- We aim to improve the investment work service by looking at the impact of unforeseen delays in undertaking any work and ensuring new revised timescales are met. We are also employing more staff to ensure investment work carried out by contractors is monitored more effectively.
- Our Customer Access Team will let a member of staff know if a customer has tried contacting them as well as passing on the member of staff's contact details, should this be requested.
- Our Development Team will improve communication with customers regarding any incomplete works where we have contractors going into liquidation.
- We are reviewing the style of lighting installed in new properties to ensure replacement lamp bulbs are readily available and not expensive.
- Training is being developed for neighbourhood teams and our Customer Access Team to allow them to deal with tree-related queries.

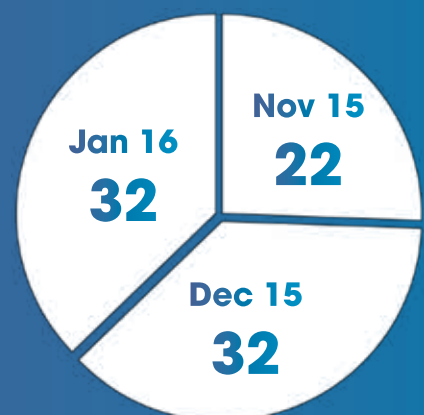
Number of NIP complaints



Compliments



Number of RFT complaints



You can contact us with a compliment or complaint by phone, email or text - please see page 2 for contact details.

Overall performance

Great Places sets itself a number of key goals, which are important to ensure that it continues to build great homes and great communities, supported by great people.



Overall satisfaction with Great Places' services

88%
(2014/15 = 86%)



Satisfaction with repairs service

91%
(2014/15 = 89%)



Amount of rent collected

99%
(2014/15 = 99.9%)



Rent not collected due to empty properties

0.5%
(2014/15 = 0.8%)



Average days to re-let empty property

24
(2014/15 = 29)



Satisfaction with the quality of your home

81%
(2014/15 = 81%)

Competition time

Complete the word search, spot the difference and survey questions, cut them out and post them to us, along with your full name and address, to be entered into a prize draw to win a **£20** shopping voucher. Six winners will be selected. Make sure you include your survey questions with your entry.

Send your entries by post to: FREEPOST, RLSC-HLLJ-EZRZ, My Great Place, Maria Morris, Great Places Housing Group, Southern Gate, 729 Princess Road, Manchester, M20 2LT

All entries must be in by Friday 6 May 2016. Remember, you don't need a stamp!

Wordsearch

Words to find are:

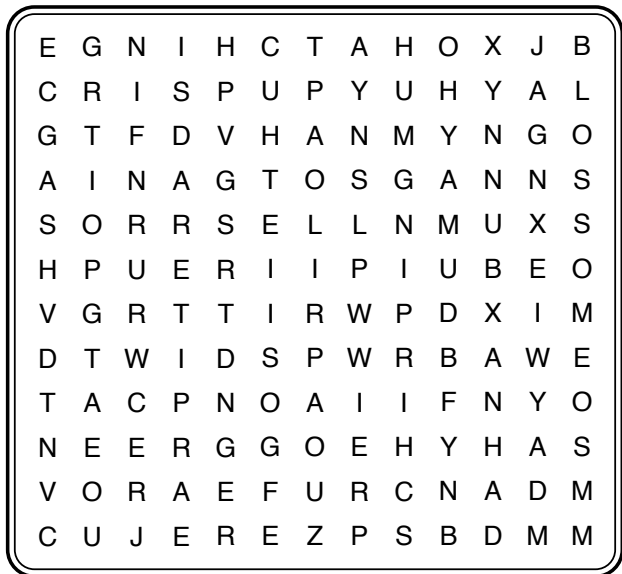
SPRING	CHIRPING	MAY
EASTER	CRISP	BUNNY
HOLIDAYS	GREEN	
BLOSSOM	OUTDOORS	
HATCHING	APRIL	

Congratulations to last issue's winners:

Wordsearch: Mr A. Adjamian – Bolton
Jacqueline Phillips – Swinton, Paul Hardy – Bolton

Spot the difference:

Kimberley Crossland – Sheffield, Eva Lacey – Oldham
Faima Begum- Hyde



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

There are five differences – can you spot them? Circle the **five** differences on photo two.



Please answer the following questions (you'll find the answers dotted around the magazine) and send it along with your competition entry in order to be entered into the prize draw.

How many Shared Spaces Fund applications has Great Places approved? _____

What percentage of Great Places homes have been approved as gas safe? _____

Name:.....

Address:

Telephone/Mobile:Email: