

We are NORTH STAR



NORTH STAR
Creating homes, building futures

Summer Edition
2020

NORTH STAR
WELCOMES 0800 REPAIR

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THORNABY COMMUNITY HUB - PRIME
LOCATION FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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WELCOME

Creating homes,
building futures



Hello and welcome to this edition of our newsletter. It covers a lot of information and updates which I hope you find helpful. You do not need me to say just how challenging the year has been for everyone so far, and as a result our services have suffered some disruption.

We have though, managed to keep this to an absolute minimum and throughout the COVID-19 crisis we have delivered essential services. We have been very mindful to ensure that the health and safety of everyone is managed effectively. We have introduced and developed further our technology, enabling more efficient processes, such as virtual tours of properties, online engagement with tenants and a webchat facility to name but a few.

We have also been working very hard to connect with tenants at a personal level where needed through telephone calls, providing shopping and prescription collection and advising on welfare benefits. We have engaged with communities and charities and have made financial contributions to food banks and food services and many other local initiatives.

This all fits with North Stars values. Our exciting work has continued and you will read of the new housing we have built, the initiatives we are involved in, the services we are providing and of the support we can offer.

We welcome and value your feedback on every aspect of our work; it's how we continue to improve.

We wish you future good health.
Best wishes

Angela Lockwood
Chief Executive



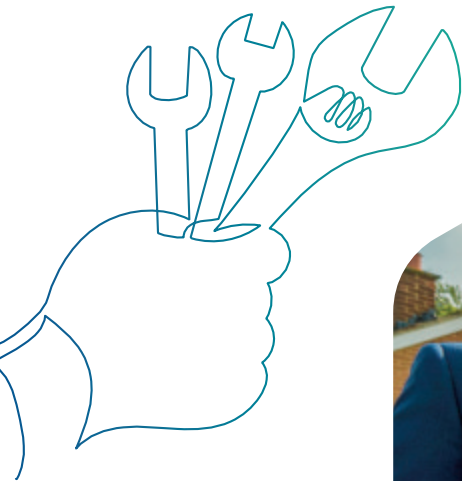
NEW FOR YOU

NORTH STAR WELCOMES 0800 REPAIR - OUR NEW DOMESTIC HEATING REPAIR AND SERVICING CONTRACTOR

From the 1st September North Star are delighted to announce that 0800 Repair will be delivering our domestic heating repairs and servicing.

0800 Repair have a proven track record of providing right first time repairs and excellent customer services through their work with other clients such as British Gas. The award of this contract to 0800 Repair will allow routine

heating repair appointments to be booked through our online tenant portal 'My North Star'. 0800 Repair are also able to offer evening and weekend repair and servicing appointments to ensure works are completed on a time and date which is convenient for our customers.



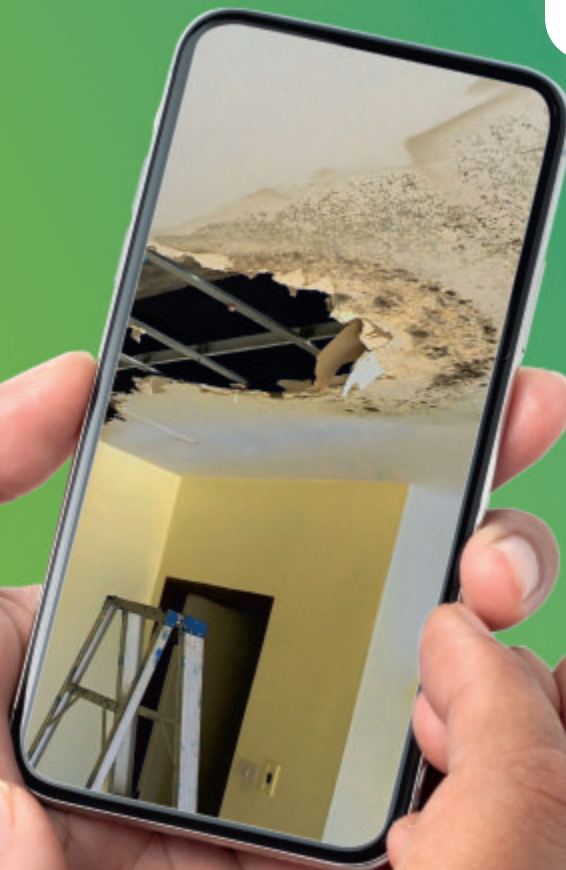
VIRTUAL CALLS USING SIGHTCALL TECHNOLOGY

NORTH STAR CAN NOW COMPLETE REMOTE
INSPECTIONS VIA YOUR SMARTPHONE AND
THE SIGHTCALL APP.

You can either download the App via your
Apple or Android store for free, or we can view
through your web browser.

SightCall is a secure platform where North
Star staff can diagnose repairs and undertake
Pre-Termination Inspections without the need
to visit your home.

This will provide a fast, remote video
assessment to improve our service and help
reduce our carbon footprint!



NEWS

A TRIBUTE TO PETER McQUILLAN



We are deeply saddened to announce that Peter McQuillan has sadly died. Peter was our Handyman at Aspen Gardens in Hardwick, Stockton.

Peter first joined the organisation back in 2000 and was a much loved colleague and friend to both staff and tenants. He will be deeply missed. Our sincere condolences go out to his wife Pat and his family and friends.

THANK-YOU SUSAN

In July, we said a farewell, thank you and good luck to North Star's receptionist at Endeavour House, Susan Atkinson, who has decided to retire.



Joining North Star in 2007, Susan was very much the face of the organisation, always greeting visitors and staff with a smile. As well as being a fantastic receptionist, Susan was provided a crucial role in processing housing applications for prospective tenants looking for a new home.

Susan will be missed by all at North Star and we wish her well in her retirement, as she plans to spend more time with her children and grandchildren.



"Thank you again to North Star for allowing the site to be used in this amazing way, it's in a prime location to ensure we reach exactly the right people."

Neta from Little Sprouts

THORNABY COMMUNITY HUB

PRIME LOCATION FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

North Star Housing's Community Hub in Havelock Street in Thornaby continues to be an important place for the local community.

During Covid-19 the Hub transformed into a distribution site for partners to prepare food parcels and nutritious meals and helped support Stockton Council distributing free school meals.

The Community Hub was opened daily by Little Sprouts Health and Wellbeing who coordinated relief efforts for delivery of food and care packages and support for families eligible for free school meals.

Neta from Little Sprouts said "Thank you again to North Star for allowing the site to be used in this amazing way, it's in a prime location to ensure we reach exactly the right people who need our help the most. We've already had some lovely feedback from the people we delivered to and those that collected from us, thanking us for providing an essential service for them."

Along with connecting partners North Star provided extra funding for additional care packages, a van driver from Groundwork NE and Cumbria and 'boredom buster' craft activities from Creation Station – Yarm to be given out to local residents.

An amazing team of organisations and volunteers have all worked together to collect generous donations from local businesses, cook meals, pack food parcels and deliver them to families in need. Groundwork NE and Cumbria were able to collect donations and surplus food from suppliers using their company vehicle and bring these back to the Hub ready to be distributed.

Mike from Groundwork says:

"Some days when I arrive at the Hub there can be 10 or more families waiting outside. I know the project will feed all of them and the others who turn up today. All the partners are doing a great job and I am glad I am playing a small part in this.

Since its refurbishment and reopening the Community Hub has proved to be an important place in the heart of the community, a space that is adaptable and has evolved to support local needs.

If you would like to know more about North Star's Community Hub and its current activities please contact Coral Smith Coral.smith@northstarhg.co.uk or 01642 796265



DOMESTIC ABUSE AWARENESS WEEK

During July, North Star held a Domestic Abuse Awareness Week. The week allowed an opportunity to raise awareness to key areas of support available for customers and staff of North Star.

During the week representatives of North Star's Domestic Abuse Champions met with MP for Darlington, Peter Gibson.

The Zoom call, was an opportunity to discuss the ongoing work carried out by North Star for customers and colleagues, who may be suffering domestic abuse. Peter Gibson MP was actively involved in the committee stage of the current Domestic Abuse Bill.

North Star work closely with domestic abuse partners in the North East including Harbour and Wearside Women in Need. All staff at North Star have received training in relation to domestic abuse, which includes spotting signs of when someone maybe suffering and what patterns to look for when visiting properties or speaking with customers on the phone.

Peter commented, "the service that North Star is offering to both their staff and customers is exemplary. For customers to know their landlord is as passionate about providing a service for domestic abuse victims will be of huge comfort. With the Domestic Abuse Bill currently undergoing it's passage through the House of Lords, I have asked that North Star share the contents of the bill with staff to show the progress made to date".

Claire Teasdale, North Star's lead on Domestic Abuse added; "North Star is committed to the work we carry out in supporting those going through domestic abuse. We support our customers and have a range of signposting strategies in place, to ensure we can get people the support they need.

North Star is very proud to have a Domestic Abuse Policy, which covers how we support colleagues who may be suffering domestic abuse. Our Domestic Abuse Champions are a group of six members of staff who are designated as confidants for staff to reach out to, should they need support or advice".



CREATING HOMES...

North Star are continuing to build new properties across our region, providing much needed, high quality homes, mainly for rent.

We currently have developments on site in locations including Thornaby; Middleton St George; Darlington; Heighington and Aycliffe Village.

These will provide family homes of two and three bedroomed sizes as well as two bedroomed bungalows. The Housing Officers for those areas are responsible for advertising upcoming vacancies just prior to a scheme being completed on site and this is nearly always through the choice based lettings system for the area.

In addition we are purchasing a small number of houses in Middlesbrough for a supported housing project that helps people who are ready to leave homeless hostels.



Mill Race,
West
Auckland

We are also preparing planning applications for bungalows in Hartlepool and houses in Middlesbrough for delivery over the next 12 to 18 months.

Over this period we hope to bring about 100 new energy efficient homes forward for our customers to meet both needs and aspirations.

Recently completed and now occupied schemes include Mill Race in West Auckland which comprises 25 houses and bungalows for rent built on the site of derelict land in the village centre, and also Yarm Road in Middleton St George where we have just finished 12 bungalows including two to full wheelchair specification.

Yarm Road,
Middleton
St George



MY NORTH STAR

My North Star was launched in November 2019 and close to 50% of all customers, have signed up to use the online portal; exceeding our expectations and targets.

My North Star allows customers to access their tenancy details online from any smart phone, tablet or computer and at any time of day or night. Customers have the ability to access their rent account, seeing all transactions that have taken place, as well as being able to download a rent statement on North Star headed paper which can be used as proof of rental account.

Perhaps the key feature of My North Star is the ability to report repairs online and schedule an appointment, at a time that is convenient to yourself. The repairs include a list of routine repairs and gives the user access to the same scheduling diaries that are used by our contractors, in order to find a suitable time for the appointment which include a selection of evening appointments and weekend appointments.

Since the launch, over 700 repairs have been successfully logged via My North Star and with nearly 50% of customers registered. Our attention has now started to shift to improving the service and adding new features to My North Star. We have created our Digital

Engagement Squad, which include members from each department of North Star, to focus on our customer facing digital services, with My North Star being the cornerstone of the development.

The squad is working through some great ideas that have already been received from our customers and we hope to launch these improvements into the service over the forthcoming months. We are keen to work closely with our customers during the projects, so if you like the sound of being involved in influencing the direction of My North Star and the Digital Engagement Squad, send an email to customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk advising that you would like to be kept up to date on the digital projects that North Star are undertaking.

To sign up to My North Star, visit www.mynorthstar.online – you will need you tenancy reference number to register, which can be located on recent correspondence from North Star. If you cannot locate your tenancy reference number, please call our Customer Service Team on 03000 110011.



**OFFERING
YOU MORE
CHOICE IN
HOW TO
CONTACT
US**



**AVAILABLE
24/7 AT A
TIME TO
SUIT YOU**



**SIMPLE,
QUICK AND
FREE TO
USE**



**COMPATIBLE
WITH
SMARTPHONE,
DESKTOP
AND
TABLET**

DOORSTEP PORTRAITS

North Star have been working with Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art on an exciting new project. We are looking for people to join in and document life following lockdown and the experiences of residents and families living in North Star accommodation or in North Star communities.

We'll come by for a friendly, physically distant chat, work with a professional photographer to take your portrait and talk with you about your COVID journey.

You will receive two A4 images of your portrait to keep or share with family and friends. We would also like to celebrate your experiences far and wide over our combined digital platforms.

If you would like to take part or would like more information please get in touch with Coral Smith, Community Connector for North Star Housing on 07501 682 560 or Coral.Smith@northstarhg.co.uk



All images credited to Craig McCann

GET INVOLVED

NORTH STAR KNOWLEDGE

- Want to be able to give your feedback and opinions on our services?
- Want to be able to help improve services for all tenants?
- Want to be able to do this in the comfort of your own home at a time that suits you?

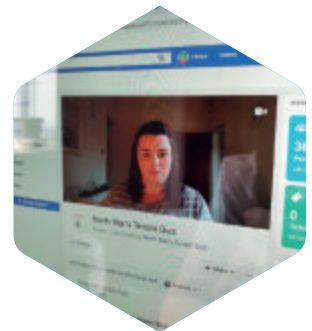
Then join North Star Knowledge, your way of keeping North Star in the know. By joining North Star knowledge you will be sent short surveys to complete and will be entered into free prize draws!

Simply email your name, email and mobile number to resident.involvement@northstarhg.co.uk



Our involved tenants took part in our first ever Facebook Live quiz back in June!

It was great to see some familiar, friendly faces during lockdown and to get everyone together for something fun!



Employment Focus Group

Placeshapers and HACT asked us to connect with our tenants recently to discuss the role of Housing Associations in helping tenants into employment.

We held our first ever Employment Focus Group via Zoom in June this year which was a great success. We advertised the meeting on Facebook and also emailed out to tenants who are on our North Star Knowledge database.

We saw tenants we have not spoken to before from a wide range of backgrounds come together online to discuss the relationship between social housing and employment.

Some great conversations were had and all feedback was passed to Placeshapers and HACT to help with their research.

You can read more about their research here:
<https://www.placeshapers.org/appg1/>

If you would like to take part in any focus groups in the future, please contact Helen Taylor – Tenant Connector on 07702 696062 or helen.taylor@northstarhg.co.uk.



You Said,
We Did

OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

Following a significant rise in feedback for our Emergency Out of Hours Service we undertook a review with Tenants' Voice Scrutiny Panel to help us improve future delivery of the service.

We issued a survey to all tenants who have used the Out of Hours Service within the last 6 months to ask for their experience and feedback. We have used this information to work with some of our Tenants' Voice Scrutiny Panel members to create a new Service Level Agreement. This document sets the expectations for the service provider and allows us to hold them to account for their level of customer service in the future.

Using the feedback and the new Service Level Agreement we have conducted a procurement process and selected Moneypenny as our new Emergency Out of Hours Service provider. The new contract will begin on 1st September and we are keen to hear feedback from tenants who use the new service. Look out for feedback opportunities or contact our customer services team on 03000 110011 to let us know how the new service is going.



You Said,
We Did

Grounds Maintenance Service

We are in the process of reviewing our Grounds Maintenance Service and have been working with tenants to help improve services.

We recently issued a survey (via text message and post) to gather feedback from our tenants who have green spaces that are maintained by North Star within 100 meters of their home.

We will be using this feedback to ensure we shape any improvements to the Grounds Maintenance Service with our tenant's voice at the forefront.



MONEY MATTERS

Has Covid-19 affected your finances?

The Covid-19 outbreak has brought in its wake an incredibly stressful period, because although this is a health-based emergency, it's also a financial-based emergency too.

We know that the virus has had a significant impact on the income of many households across the region and looks set to continue for some time. In this edition of North Star we wanted to share some advice on what you can do if you are struggling to pay your bills.

Struggling to pay your rent?

Guidance for Landlords and Tenants issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, has said that tenants are expected to continue to pay their rent during the Covid-19 period. However, if you are struggling to pay your rent because of income changes as a result of the virus, please call our Customer Service Team for advice on **03000 11 00 11**. We can put you in touch with our Welfare Benefit Team to ensure that you are claiming your full benefit entitlement.

Need help to pay your council tax?

A hardship fund has been set up to support those struggling to pay their council tax and help alleviate some of their financial burden. The hardship fund has been distributed to local authorities around the country. The fund is available to working age people already receiving local council tax support, as they have been recognised as the most vulnerable to income changes. If you think that you cannot pay your council tax due to financial strain caused by the coronavirus pandemic, you should contact your local council to see if you can benefit from the hardship fund.

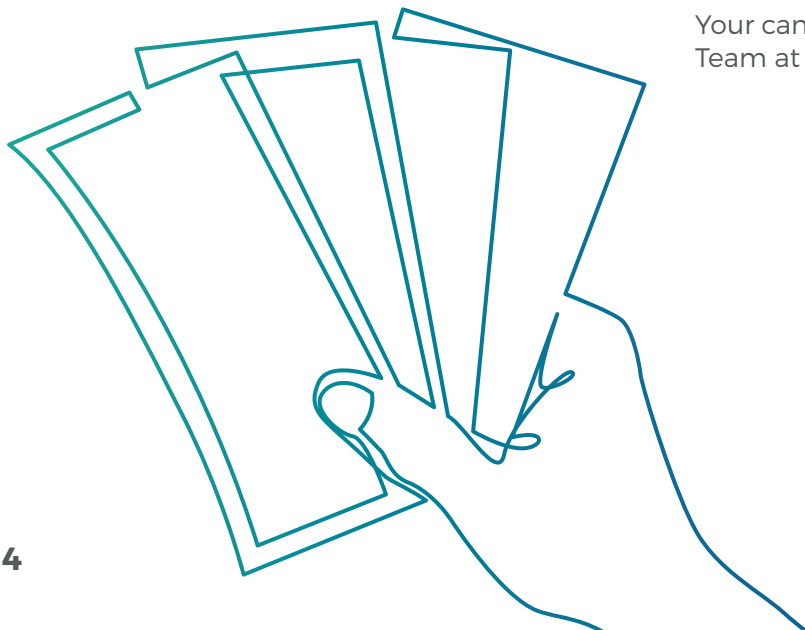
Are you entitled to Universal Credit?


During the pandemic, many workers have lost their jobs leaving many households in financial instability. If you're unemployed, off work due to sickness, or on a low income, you could be eligible for Universal Credit to cover your basic living costs. If you are self-employed, had your wages reduced, recently furloughed or made redundant you may still be able to apply.

You can check whether you are likely to be accepted for Universal Credit with this benefits calculator:

<https://moneysavingexpert.entitledto.co.uk>

You can also contact our Welfare Benefits Team at UC.enquiries@northstarhg.co.uk



A photograph showing three call center workers sitting at desks with multiple computer monitors. They are wearing headsets and appear to be working in a modern office environment with large windows in the background.

We know that the virus has had a significant impact on the income of many households across the region and looks set to continue for some time.


Struggling to pay your water bill?

If you have been affected by Covid-19 and are struggling to pay, water companies can support you by changing the way you pay or by offering payment breaks, where needed.

Water companies provide scheme for low income householders who are assessed as being in financial difficulty. A low rate tariff can be applied, which offers long term savings compared to an average household bill.


Contact your water company for more details.

 Northumbrian Water **0345 733 5566**.
(SupportPLUS) **SupportPLUS@nwl.co.uk**.

 Hartlepool Water **0142 985 8030**
(Watersure)

Struggling to top up pre-paid energy?

If you are unwell with Covid-19 or staying at home and self-isolating, you may find it difficult to top up your prepay energy meter. Energy suppliers have agreed a new emergency package to ensure that your home's energy supply doesn't get cut off. If you are unable to top up your prepayment meter, please contact your energy supplier to find out what help they can offer.

A photograph of a man with a beard and tattoos, wearing a maroon polo shirt, sitting on a sofa. He is holding a cup of coffee and looking down at a document, likely a bill, which is resting on a small wooden table in front of him.

If your finances have been severely impacted by Covid-19 and you would like some advice, please call North Star on **03000 11 00 11** to be put in touch with groups and charities that will be able to support you.

OUR SERVICES



SUPPORTED HOUSING UPDATE

Working with tenants during Lockdown has had its own challenges. Despite the fact that we have been on site daily delivering services, we have not been able to do the social face to face contact.

We have had to think of new and innovative ways of working to ensure our tenants still feel supported and have not felt socially isolated throughout lockdown.

Staff have been providing daily calls to residents, and for those who are tech savvy we have been able to offer video links, such as face time, whatsapp and skype.

We have sourced some really useful external services, such as delivery of food parcels, befriending services Hen Pals.



BUTTERKNOWLE PROJECT

Supporting the community during lockdown

During lockdown North Star staff made over 2,700 welfare calls to tenants, provided £5,700 of support to tenants in crisis situations and donated over £20,000 to local projects providing support to communities.

One project we supported in Butterknowle was run entirely by volunteers and provided much needed help to residents in a rural village. Butterknowle does not have a local shop and volunteer, Kimberley Batey wanted to ensure support was available to those most in need.

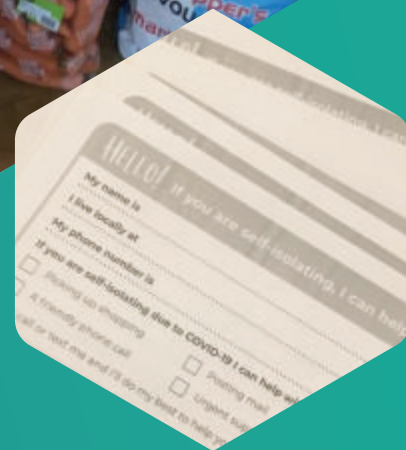
Kimberley wanted to provide 'wellness packs' that included essential items such as toilet roll, milk, bread, butter, veg, soup etc. so those who found it more difficult to get to shops, were self-isolating or shielding would have access to them.

The project grew and began providing home-cooked meals to vulnerable people. At the peak of the virus the project was supporting over 80 people in Butterknowle and the surrounding area.

Kimberley said of the project: 'Coral and the team at North Star have been beyond amazing, always going the extra mile to support those in need. I, along with the village of Butterknowle and the surrounding areas are extremely grateful for the support that has been provided. Without North Star this project wouldn't have been possible.'

'It is a great comfort to know that North Star is committed to supporting our rural communities and they have done a grand job at showing this support, particularly over the last few months when we have needed them most.'

North Star would like to say a huge thank-you to all the volunteers that made this project possible. It has been amazing to see the way communities have responded to the challenges they've faced and our privilege to play our part where we can.



OUR SERVICES

PROPOSAL TO CREATE A SINGLE LANDLORD FOR NORTH STAR HOUSING GROUP APPROVED

In May 2020 we wrote to all tenants to start a consultation on a proposed simplification to the structure of North Star Housing Group. The proposal was to consolidate the four housing associations which currently make up North Star Housing Group into a single housing association.

At a meeting on 20th July 2020 the Board considered a detailed business case for making this change together with consultation feedback from tenants and key stakeholders. The Board approved the proposal and work has started to make this change which we hope to have completed by the end of 2020.

The change will mean all tenants within the Group will have the same landlord: 'North Star'. For tenants of Darlington Housing Association and Teesdale Housing Association this will be a change to the legal identity your landlord. For tenants of Endeavour Housing Association the legal identity of your landlord will remain the same but your landlord's name will change to North Star. As a single housing association, we will continue to be a charitable housing provider which is regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing.

We believe the change will have a number of key benefits for the way we do business which will enable us to achieve savings, be more efficient and generate more funds to invest in homes and services.



As a single housing association, we will continue to be a charitable housing provider which is regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing.



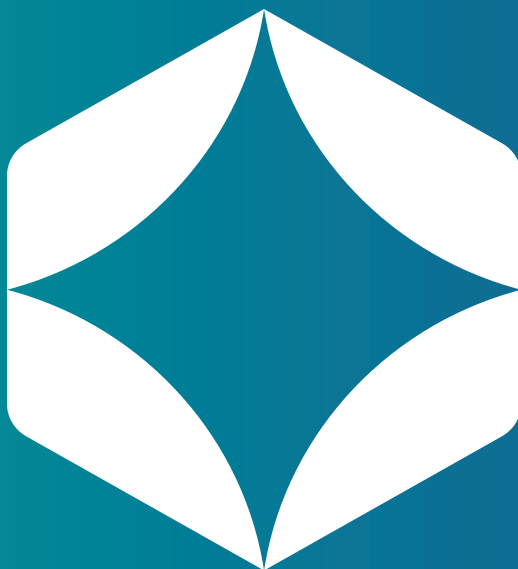
As a tenant you won't notice any change to the people you meet or services you receive from us and to reassure you the change:

- Will not affect your rights as a tenant or leaseholder.
- Will not change your tenancy agreement or lease. You will continue to enjoy the same rights you currently have.
- Will not change the services you receive. You will still be able to contact the same housing and customer service team you currently deal with.
- Will not impact repairs, servicing and improvements to your home. These will still be done in the same way.

- Will not change to how you pay your rent. You won't need to notify Housing Benefit or the Department for Work and Pensions (Universal Credit) about this change.

We will notify tenants when the process has been completed and the share the new details of your landlord. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the change please contact our customer service team by email customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk or phone on 03000 11 00 11.





North Star

North Star brings together the skills, resources and values of Endeavour, Teesdale and Darlington Housing Associations.

We are a strong organisation with a clear vision of what we want to achieve for the people who live in our region – creating homes, building futures.

GET IN TOUCH

 customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk

 www.northstarhg.co.uk

 @northstarhg

 /NorthStarHG

 03000 11 00 11

Access Services Online

www.mynorthstar.online

Write:

Endeavour House, St Marks Court, Thornaby,
Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 6QN

14a Redwell Court, Harmire Enterprise Park, Harmire Road,
Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 8BN

Please note that all calls to our Customer Services Team are monitored and recorded.

Please note our Teesdale office in Barnard Castle is by appointment only.

Collaboration

Flexibility

Integrity

Professionalism

Ambition