

Summer Edition 2023



NORTH STAR

Creating homes, building futures

# NORTH STAR



What's happening  
at North Star

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Aspen Gardens residents  
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Creating homes, building futures



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**W**elcome to North Star's summer 2023 tenants' magazine. We have another packed edition which, we hope you will find useful and informative.

The magazine is one of the few times in the year when we get the opportunity to communicate with all our tenants. For us this provides an opportunity to share information and keep our tenants updated and informed.

You may notice some more new features in this issue. The Government have challenged landlords like North Star to be more open and transparent about how they are performing and how they make decisions. We have recently been consulting tenants on how to do this best. The feature 'what's happening at North Star' is the result of this consultation. We hope this will give tenants a really good picture of how we are doing. As ever, please do get in touch and let us know what you think about it.

It's a busy time for North Star. We're working hard with our repairs contractor Ian Williams to improve the quality of our repairs

service, we know this is a priority for most tenants. We're also reviewing our approach to complaints recognizing that when things go wrong, the most important thing we can do is get the matter resolved quickly and easily for you. We will be making changes to improve the complaints service following feedback from tenants.

Finally, as this magazine lands on door mats, we will be getting ever closer to the summer holiday period. We know this can put pressure on household budgets, especially those with school-age children. We have included some information that may help reduce this pressure. However, if you find yourself struggling financially, for whatever reason, please do contact your housing officer and our welfare benefits team and talk to them about the range of ways we can help you.

From all of us at North Star, we hope you have a fantastic summer!

**Adam Clark**  
Executive Director  
of Customers



## Focus On... Chris Harris

**What's your job role and in brief, what does this entail?**

Asset Manager - I manage the asset management team, who run North Star's planned maintenance programmes including kitchens bathrooms, heating, windows and doors and external works to name a few. In addition to this we lead on sustainability of our stock and strategic asset management.

**Where did you work before North Star?**

My last role was at Darlington Borough Council as Asset and Investment Manager.

**What are your hobbies/interests?**

I love Football and am a season ticket holder at Middlesbrough, I

also love cycling both mountain biking and road cycling all rides are really just an excuse to end up at the pub for a few pints or the café for a cake which is probably my real hobby!

**What is your favourite:**

**Film?** Pulp Fiction

**Book?** The Life of Pi

**Holiday destination?** I'll say Greek islands but I love any holiday

**Food?** Have to go with PORK Parmo (the original) none of this chicken rubbish.

**Tell us an interesting fact about yourself**

When visiting New Zealand I once did a Sky Dive and the next day did a bungy jump off a cliff into a river.







# WHAT'S HAPPENING AT NORTH STAR?

WE recently held a consultation with our tenants on how we share information. Tenants told us they wanted to hear from us more often and about the things that matter including:

- ◆ **How we are performing**
- ◆ **How we make decisions**
- ◆ **How tenants are influencing what we do**

We will be sharing a monthly email containing this information with all tenants who have given us their email addresses. If you do not have an email address, we will be gathering this information together and publishing it in every edition of the tenant magazine. If you have any questions about this or would like more about the information below, please contact [communities@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:communities@northstarhg.co.uk) or telephone **03000 11 00 11** and ask for the communities team.

## How are we performing?

Delivering Maintenance Service			
Indicator	Target	Performance	How are we doing
% of homes with a valid gas safety certificate	100%	<b>99.84%</b>	
% Tenant satisfaction with repair	92%	<b>79.1%</b>	
<b>Homes with gas safety certificate</b>			
There were five gas services outside of target as of the end of April.			
One is going through court action and the remaining tenants are working closely with our housing team to get access for an inspection.			

### Tenant satisfaction with repair

Unfortunately Customer satisfaction measured through our Rant and Rave platform has dropped. Although levels of satisfaction have dropped across the social housing sector, this is below expected level.

The drop in satisfaction is primarily due to the length of time to complete a repair, something the North Star (NS) team and Ian Williams (IW) local team are monitoring on a weekly basis to ensure this is reduced. Over the next month we would expect this figure to improve as overdue job numbers come to a more acceptable level, all be it still higher than business as usual.

In addition to the IW local team, North Star property services team continue to work closely with the IW HUB to drive performance and satisfaction levels up and continue to make changes to the service to ensure improvement to services. Regular feedback is being reviewed and actioned from staff across the business and call wait times for the direct phone line into Ian Williams monitored.

Weekly and monthly contract meetings are in place along with regular project meetings being held internally to ensure performance is improving for our customers.


It is worth noting the above is linked to the new maintenance contract implemented from the 1st of September 2022, this continues to embed, along with an increase in repair volumes.


As part of our Rant and Rave process, all customers are called within 24 hours where they provide low scoring feedback on Rant and Rave, to ensure their issue is rectified, they are also logged as a service request to allow easy tracking if needed.

NEW  
For You

## How are we performing?

Managing Empty Homes			
Indicator	Target	Performance	How are we doing
% of £ lost due to empty homes	100%	1.14%	
Average time to let a property	20 days	18 days	
<b>% of £'s lost due to empty homes:</b> We have reviewed our processes for properties that we are unable to let because they need major repairs. This has impacted our performance. We expect our performance to be back in target for the next report.			

Managing Income			
Indicator	Target	Performance	How are we doing
% of £ lost due to rent arrears	2.50%	3.18%	
<b>% of £'s lost due to empty homes: % of rent arrears:</b> We did not receive the monthly direct debit and universal credit payments until the first week in May. After we received this payment, arrears reduced to 2.58%.			

Delivering Customer Service			
Indicator	Target	Performance	How are we doing
% of calls dealt with on first contact	90%	87%	
<b>Calls dealt with on first contact:</b> Our performance for dealing with calls continues to improve. Most of the calls we have been receiving require a follow up call with our contractor. This is affecting our performance and we are holding weekly meetings with the contractor to improve the efficiency of this process.			

# What's happening at Senior Management Team?

**The Senior Management Team (SMT) is made up of the:**

**Chief Executive**  
Angela Lockwood

**Executive Director of Finance and Business Support**  
James Walder

**Executive Director of Assets and Growth**  
Emma Speight

**Executive Director of Customers**  
Adam Clark

**Executive Director of People and Culture**  
Carole Richardson

Collectively the group have delegated responsibility from the Board for the running and performance of North Star. The SMT meet as a group on a monthly basis and operate using a set of guiding principles designed to support high levels of accountability and trust.

At a recent meeting some of the key points of discussion related to tenant feedback and how the voice of tenants lives within North Star. The SMT are keen to ensure the whole organisation understands what the priorities of tenants are. There is ongoing work to improve how the organisation listens and responds to tenants and uses feedback and advice from tenants to improve services. An action was taken away from the meeting to create a plan for using insight and responding to tenant priorities. This includes how North Star can strengthen the connection between the Board and tenants and use feedback to inform decisions.

Tenant satisfaction scores and feedback has highlighted this as an area North Star needs to improve. Along with other

landlords and service sectors, North Star has seen an increase in complaints. At SMT time was spent discussing two internal reports which had been prepared on complaints with one featuring a deep dive into a series of complaints to identify any systematic problems. In addition, an independent review has been commissioned to make recommendations on changes needed to improve the experience and this will be considered by SMT at a future meeting.

Performance is discussed at every meeting, to make the best use of time the SMT focus on areas outside of agreed targets. In April this included discussion of the letting of empty homes, complaints and delivery of our repairs service.

It's a challenging time for the social housing sector and the nature of the discussions at the SMT reflect this. In a challenging operating environment, North Star is striving to deliver excellent services, to remain financially strong so we can continue to invest in existing and new homes and to remain connected and responsive to the hundreds of people who call a North Star property, home.



# THE BOARD OF NORTH STAR HOUSING

NEW  
For You



## Who are the North Star Board?

The Board is made up of 'board members' who are recruited in a robust, open, and transparent manner and bring a significant range of skills, careers, industries, and backgrounds. The members are named on the North Star website which also includes a little bit about each person. <https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/about-north-star/north-star-structure-and-history/board-members/>

## What do the Board do?

We also call board members non-executive directors because they do not take part in the day-to-day running of the organisation. Instead, the role of the Board is; to be stewards of the North Star culture and values; to lead the co-creation of strategic vision and then the delivery and oversight of implementation; and to satisfy itself that North Star's regulatory obligations are met.

The Board scrutinises the financial stability and governance of the organisation. In other words, how well it is managed. All our surplus is reinvested in line with our vision and values. One key aspect of the Board is to appoint the Chief Executive Officer, to which the Board delegates the operational leadership whilst retaining ultimate responsibility for the organisation.

The Board has two permanent sub-committees which undertake detailed work on behalf of the Board in the areas of Risk & Audit and Remuneration & Conditions. We will talk more about these committees in future newsletters.



## How might the Board change in the future?

A board member can only stay in post for 6 years (up to 9 years in some circumstances), so we actively manage this rotation to maintain the right skills. We are striving to have a diverse balanced board and actively seek suitable candidates with a range of diverse characteristics.

To be more proactive, in 2021 we launched a Board Trainee programme in partnership with Housing Diversity Network and our board trainees' details are also on our website. Also, in February 2023, we signed up to the Chair's Challenge on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and are working to deliver this.

## Where is the Board's focus now?

In April 2023, North Star launched a new 3-year plan called Leading & Growing to 2026. This was co-created with the help of involved-tenants, all our staff, the Executive, and the Board over several sessions. The Board will keep clear oversight and help support the Executive in delivering this plan.

What are we doing to ensure we can deliver the plan? The Board owns and scrutinizes the management of key risks that could impact delivery, and these are documented in the Strategic Risk Register. The risks arising from the cost-of-living crisis are one of the most significant areas to keep on the Board radar, both the personal impact on our tenants and communities, as well as the impact on North Star financial planning. Tenants must be safe in their homes; therefore, the delivery of good repairs and maintenance services are critical activities for the Board to focus.

Tenants are at the heart of what we do, and the Board works closely with the Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel and looks at other sources of tenant feedback. We are listening to the needs of our tenants. If you would like to become involved in how we run your services, please contact [communities@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:communities@northstarhg.co.uk)



If you would like to register, please visit <https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/its-your-voice/> or call 03000 11 00 11 and ask for the communities team.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH TENANT INVOLVEMENT?

Our involved tenants recently created a definition of what an involved tenant at North Star is. It was designed to help everyone understand what involvement is and why we do it. The definition they came up with is:

### WE ARE TENANTS

We welcome all tenants to have their voices heard. We move with the times and challenge North Star's ways to make life better for everyone.

#### Creative

We are tenants that listen to tenants. We are empowered to adapt and change to what tenants need. Your views help us to improve services for everyone.

#### Connected

We are tenants that are passionate and care about connecting with tenants, staff and The Board to improve services. We welcome the voices of all tenants as we are listened to and valued.

#### Courageous

We are tenants that use the voice of tenants to challenge North Star and The Board. We build relationships and respect one another.

Recently our Involved tenants have been helping us to review our approach to complaints, understand how we can make the information we share more accessible and helping us to improve our Aids and Adaptations Policy. See more on these activities in the Get Involved section of this magazine on page 11.

We recently ran a campaign to increase the number of people on our Your Voice tenant involvement database. We were really pleased to be able to double this number to 211. People on the database have access to opportunities to be paid for their opinions and enter into prize draws for completing surveys.

## Panzanella salad

Serves 4

This recipe is perfect for summer and has already gone down a storm with residents at Rosedale, who cooked with Sprouts CiC.

- 1 large baguette, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 120ml extra-virgin olive oil, divided into 2
- 3 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. honey
- Salt and Pepper
- 1 large, seedless cucumber, roughly chopped
- 2 pt. cherry tomatoes (preferably multi-colored), halved
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 bunch basil, torn

## Method

- 1 Pre-heat a large skillet over medium-high heat.
- 2 Meanwhile, in a large bowl, toss bread with 60ml of the olive oil. Add bread to skillet and toast until golden and crisp, about 10 minutes. Drain and set aside to cool.
- 3 Make dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together red wine vinegar, remaining 60ml olive oil and honey. Season with salt and pepper.
- 4 To large bowl, add crispy bread, cucumber, tomatoes, onion and garlic. Toss with dressing until evenly coated and season with more salt and pepper.
- 5 Garnish with basil and serve.



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# NEWS

## ASPEN GARDENS RESIDENTS PREPARE FOR HENS!

Aspen Gardens, North Star's Extra Care Accommodation in Hardwick, secured funding from Henpals.

HenPals seeks to promote backyard hen-keeping amongst more British households, reducing demand from intensive farming systems while sharing the educational, environmental and therapeutic benefits of keeping hens.

The end goal is to have hens which the tenants will care for. Dave Ayton, Aspen Gardens' handyman has built an enclosure with a coop for the hens.

A group of tenants have been attending various creative classes creating artwork around the hens including poems, feather printing and wooden displays which will be used to decorate the newly built summer house.

Tenants are attending the gardening club weekly prepping the beds for seasonal vegetables and flowers.

Everyone is looking forward to the warmer weather so they can socialise and enjoy the garden area.



### New Furniture Ruskin Court and St Cuthbert's Court

Two of our older Persons Schemes Ruskin Court and St Cuthbert's Court recently received a welcomed upgrade of furniture to be enjoyed in their communal spaces.

The upgrade has created a bright cheerful space, encouraging residents to come together and enjoy a natter or a communal gathering.

**Jean at Ruskin Court said**  
*'What a big difference, It is much brighter and better'*

**Maureen said**  
*'It's absolutely lovely, the seating that we are sitting on is so comfortable, it's like being in your front room'*

Even Bella the Poodle is enjoying the new communal space!

**Cath and Carol at St Cuthbert's Court Said**

*'The new chairs are beautiful, they look really nice and bright! Many of the tenants have commented on how well the lounge looks now, it is just lovely!'*





# TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

**We need your feedback to help us improve the services we deliver to all our tenants.**

**All social housing providers in England must collect data on a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's).**

The measures form part of a new system developed by the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how well social housing landlords are providing good quality homes and services.

We are working with TLF Research who are doing surveys on our behalf.

TLF Research will contact our tenants either by telephone or email.

If TLF Research contacts you, we would appreciate it if you can answer their questions about our services and give them feedback about us.

**They will ask questions about:**

- Our repairs service
- How safe you feel in the area you live
- Your neighbourhood
- Our approach to complaints

The feedback will be used to improve our services.

Your answers are confidential between TLF and North Star.

**More information about TSM's can be found on our website [www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/tenant-satisfaction-measures/](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/tenant-satisfaction-measures/)**



# NEWS



## North Star FUTURE PROPERTIES

**We were pleased to add 71 new homes to our stock during 2022-23 despite costs rising and difficulties with the construction and Planning systems**

These new homes were in Middlesbrough, Stockton, North Yorkshire, Durham and Stockton and included bungalows, houses and flats for rent and Rent to Buy as well as houses for supported housing tenants.

North Star is working on a healthy pipeline of future properties across our area with completions scheduled for the next three years.

Some of those properties that were completed in recent months include 22 new homes for rent at Middlehaven in Middlesbrough.

We have just started on site on two bungalow schemes in Hartlepool which have been long delayed but will be ready to let in about a year.



Get  
Involved

# COMMUNITY GRANTS APPLICATIONS OPEN

**North Star are appealing to local groups and community organisations to send us their applications for their chance to receive a grant up to £2500 for new projects and activities.**

We are looking for projects that benefit our tenants and contribute to one or more of our following four strategic priorities:

Priority will be given to projects that can be delivered in the following areas - Hartlepool (Belle Vue) Teesdale (Evenwood and Cockfield) Thornaby, Stockton (Town Centre) Middlesbrough (Gresham/Newport) East Cleveland (Carlin How and Skinningrove)

A panel of staff and tenants meet three times throughout the year to appraise the applications and award funding.

- ◆ 14th June 2023
- ◆ 1st November 2023
- ◆ 14th February 2024

**It is easy to apply!  
Complete an online  
application and submit  
a short video explaining  
your idea.**

Further  
information can  
be found on our  
website.

[www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/community-grants/](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/community-grants/)

GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



SUSTAINABLE  
CITIES AND  
COMMUNITIES



NO  
POVERTY



QUALITY  
EDUCATION



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## Get Involved



### Previous Grants

Projects supported from the previous round of funding included a dementia activity group and care partner support group with Young at Heart ULO in Thornaby, children's easter activities at Lets Pretend and Play CIC in Hartlepool, Youth Shack a 3 week programme with Groundwork based at the Foxwood Project in Skinningrove aimed at building confidence and skills for those aged 15-29 and Brightwoods Forest School who delivered several nature-based workshops to promote health, wellbeing and self-care at the Randolph Centre in Evenwood

#### Brightwoods Forest School Quote from Gemma McColl, Director and Forest School Practitioner

"Bright Woods Forest School CIC loved taking our workshops out in to the community, activities included green wood working, wreath making, campfire chutney making and printmaking. All the workshops were very well received and during the sessions attendees repeatedly told us how valuable it was to have the chance to connect with others and learn new skills, many commenting that they rarely had the opportunity to take time out for themselves and how relaxing and rewarding it was."



## TENANTS CLIMATE JURY PROVIDES RECOMMENDATIONS TO NORTH STAR.

In 2021, the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) conducted a Tenants' Climate Jury involving 30 tenants from five northern social landlords. The process took place over 10 weeks with each tenant giving 30 hours of their time to the process.

The NHC jury produced 10 recommendations in answer to the question:

**"How can tenants, social housing providers, and others work together to tackle climate change in our homes and neighbourhoods?"**

A full report of the work done by the NHC jury, including their recommendations can be read here: [www.northern-consortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Tenants-Climate-Jury-Report.pdf](http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Tenants-Climate-Jury-Report.pdf)

North Star have recently secured grants from the decarbonisation fund to carry out efficiency and environmental improvement works on 40 properties (with the possibility of 150 more imminently).

We formed a North Star Tenants' Climate Jury to take the recommendations made by the NHC's group and ensure they are applicable and fit for purpose for our organisation.

We did this by approaching those tenants who had (or were due to have) improvements done

through the decarbonisation fund and other tenants who may be interested to form the Jury.

We followed a process, that mirrored the NHC's but, respected the work that had already been done and would create maximum benefit for North Star.

The process ran over 6 sessions with meetings taking place on Zoom in order to maximise involvement and engagement.

Each session was designed to build the jury's understanding and knowledge of climate change and the challenge it presents to North Star.

The jury heard from Middlesbrough Environment City, staff from the NHC and also staff from North Star. They were able to challenge and ask questions of the presenters.

The Jury made eight recommendations in total and their report will be published to the North Star website in June.

If you would like more information on this work please contact [communities@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:communities@northstarhg.co.uk) or telephone 03000 11 00 11.

# TVSP INVESTIGATE NORTH STAR'S APPROACH TO COMPLAINTS



The Tenants Voice Scrutiny Panel (TVSP) is an independent group of tenants who carry out resident-led scrutiny of North Star.

As part of the current scrutiny programme, TVSP have been looking at North Star's Customer Commitments. The group were due to look at commitment three - We will provide you with a safe home that is in good repair. If we don't, we will make it easy for you to tell us and make sure you understand how we will make it right.

During initial conversations on how to approach the consultation for this commitment, the group identified, through personal experience and from feedback from performance data, that the number of complaints had increased during the period from September 2022 to the present.

Furthermore, data on satisfaction with how North Star handles complaints (53% satisfied – lowest element of Institute of Customer Service (ICS) survey score and down from 64%) showed that the organisation could improve this area of its work.

The group decided to pause its work on the third commitment to concentrate on reviewing how North Star handles complaints.

TVSP met regularly to discuss the project and used interviews, and document reviews to build a picture of how North Star handles complaints and issues compensation.



# Get Involved

## TVSP INVESTIGATE NORTH STAR'S APPROACH TO COMPLAINTS (CONTINUED)

### Specifically, the group did the following to complete their review:

- Met with Katherine Allen, Complaints and Performance Co-ordinator to understand the current picture of complaints at North Star and how the organisation responds to them.
- Reviewed comments captured by the Rant and Rave feedback system specifically related to complaint handling.

### Reviewed the following policies and documents:

- Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure 2022.
- Customer Complaints Guide.
- Compensation and Claims Policy 2022
- The measures North Star employs to ensure consistency of complaint handling.
- Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Persistent Complaints Policy.
- Compensation leaflet.
- Reviewed the Comments and Compliments spreadsheet used to record informal service feedback.
- Met with Sara Herrington, Head of Tenants to ask questions on specific processes and approaches as well as how the organisation is responding to the challenges of complaints
- Met with Katherine Allen, Complaints and Performance Officer, to discuss the Comments and Compliments Spreadsheet.

The group learned that North Star, and all housing associations are operating in an extremely challenging and changed environment following the Covid-19 pandemic. There have also been a number of negative stories regarding damp and mould and how housing associations have responded to it. Some people have been experiencing higher levels of mental health concerns and some have a lower threshold of tolerance for service errors.

Research from the Money & Mental Health Policy Institute found 30% of tenants in social housing experienced mental ill health, higher than for other tenures.

The Institute of Customer Service research identified nationally, that 51% of staff, working for all types of organisations, felt customer tolerance had fallen.

The organisation had also faced challenges related to working with a new contractor (these issues were looked at separately) which had caused a spike in complaints and put extra pressure on the system.

North Star had also implemented changes to its policies as a result of work by the Housing Ombudsman, for example, reducing complaints stages to two. The group acknowledged this work had been carried out with necessary speed and that the changes were mostly positive.

### The broad issues the group want their recommendations to address can be summarised as:

- 1 How does North Star ensure that all complaints are dealt with in the same way as much as possible? Particularly when new staff deal with complaints.
- 2 How does North Star ensure its approach to issuing compensation for poor service is both fair, transparent and does not put any more stress on tenants that have already had a poor experience?
- 3 How does North Star ensure it can actively receive complaints? Specifically, how can it make sure it is as easy as possible for tenants to complain and give the organisation feedback.

The group have made seven recommendations directly to board that will be actioned by North Star in the coming weeks.

The recommendations focus on making the complaints process more consistent, improving the skills of staff who deal with complaints and making sure that access to compensation is clear and fair.

You can read a full version of the report on the North Star website at

[www.northstarhg.co.uk/  
get-involved/scrutiny-reports/](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk/get-involved/scrutiny-reports/)

For more information on TVSP and to join the group please contact [communities@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:communities@northstarhg.co.uk) or telephone 03000 11 00 11 and ask for the communities team.



## ACTIVITIES AND FOOD FOR CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS.

The school summer holidays are approaching and for many parents this can bring extra pressures on the household budget.

Most local authorities have summer activity schemes available for children who are eligible for free school meals. You can find out more about the schemes in your area by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/after-school-holiday-club> and entering your postcode.

**We have listed some of the schemes for councils in our area below:**

### **Stockton on Tees**

Holidays Are Fun Programme  
<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/HAF>

### **Middlesbrough**

Holiday Activities and Food Programme  
<https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/children-families-and-safeguarding/support-for-families/holiday-activities-and-food-haf-programme/>

### **Darlington**

Holiday Activities and Food Programme  
<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/healthy-darlington/eastbourne-sports-complex/holiday-activities/>

### **Redcar and Cleveland**

Holiday Activity and Food Programme  
<https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/children-and-families-services>

### **Hartlepool**

Filling the Holiday Gap  
<https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/educationandearlyyears>

### **Durham County**

Fun and Food Programme  
<https://www.durham.gov.uk/funandfood>

### **North Yorkshire**

FEAST  
<https://northyorkshiretogether.co.uk/feast/>

Many local charitable organisations also provide activity clubs for children during the holidays including Feast of Fun (<https://togetharmac.org.uk/initiatives/feast-of-fun>) in Middlesbrough and Cleveland. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for more information on these activities as we get it. Finally, many restaurants and cafes offer 'Kids Eat Free' deals during the holidays. Some of the most affordable include supermarkets with cafes such as Morrisons and also Pausa Café inside Dunelm stores. Some are also offering kids eat for £1 such as Asda cafes and Bella Italia restaurants. Again, keep an eye on our Facebook page for more information on these offers as we get it.

## BBQ AND FIRE SAFETY

With the good weather now on its way, it is now time to bring out the BBQ again.

Whilst this can be a fun, social gathering, BBQs can present a serious fire safety risk and it is important to follow some simple guidelines to ensure you remain safe.

- Never use BBQs indoors or on a balcony
- Ensure the BBQ is in good working order
- Ensure the BBQ is on flat, level ground well away from outbuildings, bins, sheds, bushes, and trees
- The BBQ should be in open air, never underneath a marquee or covered area
- Never leave the BBQ unattended
- Keep the surrounding area of the BBQ clear
- Keep children and pets away from the BBQ
- Keep a bucket of sand or water nearby for emergencies
- Never wear loose clothing when cooking on a BBQ
- Ensure the BBQ is cool before moving it
- Never put hot ashes or coal in the bin

For more fire safety advice visit [www.clevelandandfire.gov.uk](http://www.clevelandandfire.gov.uk)

# MONEY MATTERS



## Have you received your Cost Of Living Payment?

The first instalment of the Cost of Living Payment of £301 for those in receipt of qualifying benefits started to be paid from 25 April with most payments made by 17 May.

If you think you should have received a Cost of Living payment but, haven't, you can report it by logging a note in your online benefits journal.



## Universal Credit Migration from Tax Credits

From April 2023 to the end of March 2024, those on Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit (and not on any other 'legacy benefit') will be sent letters inviting them to claim UC and their Tax Credits will stop after 3 months.

### If you've had a letter telling you to claim Universal Credit

What you have to do depends on what's in the letter.

If the letter gives a deadline for you to claim Universal Credit, it's a 'migration notice'. The deadline should be at least 3 months after the date the notice was sent.

If your letter doesn't have a deadline, you don't have to claim Universal Credit unless you want to. You won't be able to go back to your old benefits after you claim. Check if you'll be better off on Universal Credit before you claim.

## If you've got a migration notice

You should claim Universal Credit by the deadline on the letter.

Your old benefits will stop after the deadline. If you claim Universal Credit before the deadline, the DWP might pay you extra to stop you being worse off. This is called 'transitional protection'.

This means that if you'd get less on Universal Credit than your old benefits, you'll get an extra amount to make up the difference. The DWP will reduce the extra amount over time - so you'll eventually just get what you normally would on Universal Credit.

**Transitional protection also means you might be able to get Universal Credit when you wouldn't usually be entitled to it.**

### If you:

- are a full-time student who wouldn't usually get Universal Credit, you can usually get it until the end of your course
- get tax credits and have over £16,000 savings, you can get Universal Credit for up to a year

Please seek advice if you decide to move onto Universal Credit before you receive your migration notification. This will ensure that you will be better off and that you do not lose out on any transitional protection you might be entitled to.

[Welfare.benefits@northstarhrg.co.uk](mailto:Welfare.benefits@northstarhrg.co.uk)

# Our Services



## ARE YOU STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET?

You may not be claiming your full entitlement.

Talk to someone who can help with your budgeting and claiming benefits

Are you struggling to cope with financial pressures? Need some help with claiming welfare benefits?

Our impartial advice service helps our tenants with budgeting, benefits queries and income maximisation. It can also help our new tenants with setting a budget for their new home to help sustain their tenancy.

Find out more:  
<https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/your-home/rent/welfare-benefits-officer/>

## Service with respect

At North Star, we support the Service With Respect campaign from the Institute of Customer Service.

We're committed to providing excellent customer service, but we maintain a zero-tolerance policy for harassment, bullying, and abuse.

Our employees treat people with dignity and respect, and deserve the same courtesy.

For free and confidential help and advice on managing your money, contact our welfare benefits team:

[Welfare.benefits@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:Welfare.benefits@northstarhg.co.uk)

03000 11 00 11



# Our Services



## DOMESTIC ABUSE

North Star are committed to signposting and supporting customers who may be experiencing domestic abuse

If you have concerns with regard to a partner or you have concerns relating to a family member, friend or neighbour's partner you can request a disclosure under Clare's Law. Clare's Law is a domestic abuse disclosures scheme. It is a police policy giving people the right to know if their current or ex-partner has any previous history of violence or abuse. An application can be made at your local police station or by calling 101. Information regarding the scheme can be found at [clares-law.com/](https://clares-law.com/)

If you have concerns regarding domestic abuse please contact us on 03000 11 00 11.



## COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS & COMPLIMENTS PROCESS

We welcome complaints, comments and compliments. We value this feedback because without it, we would not be able to learn from when things have gone wrong and also when things go right.

### How to make a complaint

We want to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint about our services and they can be made in any of the following ways?



In person



In writing



By telephone



By email on services  
[@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:@northstarhg.co.uk)



Via our website, [northstarhg.co.uk/your-home/your-tenancy/complaints-compliments-and-comments/](https://northstarhg.co.uk/your-home/your-tenancy/complaints-compliments-and-comments/)



Through another person, perhaps an advocate, social worker, solicitor, etc.



Through comments made on surveys



Through comments on social media such as Facebook, Twitter etc.



We will deal with anonymous complaints, comments and compliments in the same way.

We have a simple complaints process involving just two stages.

Once we have received your complaint, we will write to you within two working days providing you with details of who will be looking into the complaint and when you should receive a response by.

A stage one complaint will be dealt with by a manager who will endeavour to resolve the complaint within 10 working days.

If you are not happy with the outcome of stage one, it will go to the stage two process and will be dealt with by a senior manager or director who will endeavour to resolve the complaint in 10 working days.

If we are unable to resolve the complaint in these timescales, we will contact you in writing on what we are intending to do to resolve the complaint and by when.

When we are writing to you, we will provide information on how the complaint can be escalated if you remain dissatisfied.

If you are not satisfied with how North Star is handling your complaint, you can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)





## 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

Are you registered for my North Star if so contact us using the link:

[www.mynorthstar.online](http://www.mynorthstar.online)

 [www.northstarhg.co.uk](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk)

 [@northstarhg](https://www.facebook.com/northstarhg)

 [@northstarhg](https://twitter.com/northstarhg)

 03000 11 00 11

 [customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk)

### 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.

**Creative**

**Connected**

**Courageous**