

Tarka Times

Issue 18 Autumn 2011



Tarka Housing

A member of Westward Housing Group

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Large print version in 18 point Arial font

If you or someone you know would like this issue of Tarka Times on CD or audio tape, in large print, in Braille or in another language, please contact our Communications Team on 01803 217560 or at info@tarkahousing.org.uk

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Seasonal Holiday Closing

We close at 5pm on 23rd December and re-open on 3rd January

Where is this?

Do you recognise this beautiful view? Let us know on a postcard at our Freepost address (see page 2) to enter the draw to win a £10 voucher.

Congratulations to Mr S. Heath of Torrington who correctly recognised 'Appledore looking towards the bar of the Torridge and the Taw in the distance' last issue and wins the £10 voucher.



Rent First please!

Things to do before Christmas

Pay my rent

Turkey

Christmas Tree

Kids present

Drinks

Christmas is a wonderful time for giving. But it's easy to feel pressured into spending money you don't have - especially if you have children. You may even be tempted to spend your rent money on festivities. But if you do you are putting your home at risk.

This year why not avoid the stress and anxiety of debt and eviction by spending wisely and prioritising your rent?

That way you'll have a happy Christmas and peace of mind.

How To Contact Us

Opening hours: 9am-5pm Monday to Friday

Tarka Office:

Freepost RRRT-UBBY-UYLT, Tarka Housing, Tarka House,
Clovelly Road Industrial Estate, Bideford EX39 9HN

Telephone numbers:

Switchboard: 01237 428080

Customer Involvement: 01237 428088

Housing Services: 01237 428090

Freephone Repairs: 0800 107 8191

Out of Hours: 01752 770302

If you have hearing problems, please use our RNID
Typetalk on 18001 0800 500 888
(textphone users) or 0800 7311 888
(hearing people).

Text: 07768 616161

Email: info@tarkahousing.org.uk

Tarka staff email formula:

firstname.surname@tarkahousing.org.uk

or info@tarkahousing.org.uk

Website: www.tarkahousing.org.uk

Tarka Housing has moved!

Tarka Housing has a new home in Bideford – aptly named Tarka House.

Tarka is now based at Clovelly Road Industrial Estate but keeps all the same phone numbers and emails.

The new office is a great move as it means:

- Better tenant facilities for training and meetings
- A long-term investment as the lease on the old building was running out and we chose to buy rather than rent again
- It is cheaper to run
- It has a lift so is accessible throughout
- Moving nearer the heart of Tarka's housing stock
- We have now doubled the Tarka Works staff to 32 so we have more direct labour in-house services who will have more room at the new site
- We are investing in local jobs and local people
- It is near Atlantic Village shops, so more convenient for customers to drop in – bus routes you can use are Turners Tours 15, Holsworthy Ltd 15X, and Stagecoach Devon 70.

Our meeting rooms have been named as follows:

Lundy Room (Board Room),
Darwin Room (Tenants Resource Room),
Kingsley Room (Training Room)

Tel: 01237 428080

**Tarka House, Clovelly Road Industrial Estate, Bideford
EX39 3HN**

Quids In magazine

We enclose a copy of Quids In, an independent money advice magazine, and hope you enjoy and find it useful.

We have signed up for the next four issues and you will receive them with Tarka Times each issue. Let us know if you would like them to continue.

Money matters

Money-saving tips

Drain Cleaner

Pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of bicarbonate of soda down the drain. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of white vinegar. Wait five minutes and flush down with a kettle of boiling water.

Oven Cleaner

Sprinkle water onto the stain whilst the oven is still warm and then add salt. When the oven cools, scrape the spill away. Always keep a sheet of aluminium foil at the base of your oven to catch any spills and replace it as needed.

Microwave Cleaner

Mix water and lemon juice. Place in an uncovered bowl and heat for three minutes. The condensation it lets off will loosen any spills.

Window Cleaner

Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of white vinegar 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ pints of hot water. It will clean well and leave no smears. Lemon juice or vinegar in water also gets good results.

Lime Scale

Fill the kettle or container with equal amounts of water and white vinegar and boil. Switch off and let it cool. Rinse thoroughly with clean water. Boil several times to eradicate any left-over vinegar smell.

Kinder on your skin and healthier for the environment too

Money Advice Service

The Money Advice Service works to boost financial capability and independence. Whatever the situation with your finances, it's good to know where you stand and that you are making the most of what you have.

The independent government service aims to help you understand monetary matters and manage finances better.

They provide a useful guide to making the most of your money which can be accessed online along with resources to help with financial management at www.moneyadvice.org.uk

The Money Advice Service has also produced a new online money adviser which helps you plan for the future in just 10 minutes.

The questions are straightforward, with nonnumerical data needed, and the tool creates an easy-to-follow personalised action plan after completion of the short health check.

To try out the health check visit <http://tinyurl.com/4yboqm6>

Active tenants

'Move Forward' together

The theme of this year's Active Tenants Event was 'Moving Forward', focussing on the Tenant Panel Action Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Offer.

This year's event was our most well attended yet, with a total of 30 residents and 10 staff members coming to the Durrant House Hotel in Northam for a day of fun, facts and finding out!

Managing Director, Nigel Barnard, opened the event with much gusto. Serious issues were given thoughtful but fun approach in the form of role plays and questions around various scenarios such as parking, dog ownership and other issues courtesy of Steps Drama. And we then had fun learning that 55% of effective communication is body language, 38% tone and only 7% words!

Presentations from Nigel Barnard, Paul Raeburn and Tenant Panel Chair Julia Bowden looked at the Tenant Panel Action Plan for the year ahead, paying particular attention to what they would like to do in their neighbourhoods.

We also reviewed the Annual Report asking for feedback before it went out to customers. A full discussion took place on Tarka's proposed Neighbourhood Strategy, which is based on your priorities and subjects that you are concerned about. Steps Drama skilfully brought out both the humorous and serious aspects of issues related to parking and dog ownership. This fuelled a lively debate from our Active tenants that was informative and fun at the same

time. Your feedback from this session has given us a lot of useful information that will help us shape and improve our services.

We would greatly appreciate more input from you, so please contact Alister or Ami in the Customer Involvement Team on 01237 428088 if you are interested in getting involved.

Barbara is our new Chief Executive!

Barbara Shaw has been appointed Westward Housing Group's new Chief Executive. As you know, Westward Housing Group is the parent organisation of both Tarka and Westcountry Housing. Barbara is currently Managing Director of Guinness Hermitage and we look forward to her taking on her new role with us in January 2012.

She has worked in the housing sector for the past ten years and prior to being a managing director has specialised in Care and Support Services as well as Communications.

Barbara said, "This is a fantastic opportunity to lead an organisation that is committed to delivering great homes and services in what is becoming an increasingly challenging environment. I am positive that key to the organisation's success will be working with the board, staff and stakeholders to get the best out of Westward for its customers."

Multi-Faith & Cultural Diary

All dates are shown using the Gregorian (Western) calendar. The calendar is accurate, but some dates may vary regionally because they are determined by the lunar calendar. Jewish festivals usually begin at sundown on the previous day.

Focus: St. Valentines Day 14th February

Saint Valentine was a third century A.D. Bishop of Terni, who was martyred on February 14th. February 15th was a very licentious festival of Lupercalia, and its immoral goings on upset the early church.

Seeking an alternative, they picked on an innocent saint who was celebrated on the day before Lupercalia, hoping he would set a good example and stop the sexual excesses of Lupercalia. Unfortunately the Romans and other early Christians merely transferred the Lupercalian festivities to one day earlier! Over time the day has become much toned down and is now more like the romantic festival the church wanted.

December

- 21** Hanukkah (Jewish)
- 22** Winter Solstice – Yule (Pagan)
- 25** Christmas Day (Christian)
- 26** Boxing Day (secular)

January

- 1** New Year's Day (secular)
- 14** Makar Sankranti (Hindu)

February

21 Shrove Tuesday (Christian), Pancake Day and Mardi Gras

22 Ash Wednesday (Christian first day of Lent)

To find out your nearest place of worship across a range of faiths, there is now a handy list online at <http://pow.reonline.org.uk/>

Making Business Work Better

We have been looking at the structure of the board of management for Westward Housing Group, with a group of customers, board members and staff from Tarka, Westcountry and Westward.

This will not affect how you receive your services, or change the legal structure of the organisation.

We want to make decision-making about strategy, operations and service delivery work better so we are more efficient.

Having a more efficient board structure is a key part of this. At present Westward Housing Group operates through three boards – Westward, Westcountry and Tarka. Westcountry and Tarka's role is to deliver services locally, while the Group board deals with development, strategy, finance and other central services.

We will strengthen customer influence in decision-making and involvement in monitoring by making resident service panels closer to the board of management.

Any major decision has to be agreed by all three boards, separately; and the administrative time and costs of servicing all three Boards is considerable. So we aim to refine and improve this.

We will be in touch shortly to tell you more about the future of these structures and aim to be able to take any agreed plans forward in the Spring. We want you to be involved in helping shape service panels which monitor services by area and make recommendations to the Boards.

If you have any questions before the consultation, please feel free to contact me, Vanessa Gray - Communications Manager, through the online form at www.tarkahousing.org.uk, at vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk or on 01803 217560.

Free Tenant Training

Free online training for tenants!

The Housing e-Academy in collaboration with TAROE are pleased to announce a brand new range of online training courses developed specifically for tenants and residents of UK social housing.

The courses are available free to anyone who lives in social housing

A wide range of short courses are available from “Basic Home Maintenance” to “Hate Crime” and “Getting Started with Social Media” – there is something for everyone in this suite of specially designed e-learning courses. Training can be accessed from any computer with an internet connection

whether it is at home, at work, in a public library or internet café.

How to get started

To get your organisation signed up to provide this training opportunity to your tenants you will simply need to visit our website and fill in the online registration form. You can then advertise the free service to your tenants who can register themselves for training by visiting our website. Once the learner is registered they will have access to all of the courses detailed overleaf.

Any time any pace

Courses can be done in stages so they don't have to be completed all in one go. E-learning is designed to be flexible so it can be undertaken at a time, pace and place to suit the learner. When the learner has completed their training they can print out their own certificate of completion.

Full support along the way

If you require any help and support throughout the training process contact our dedicated help desk for free advice.

Register your interest now

To register your interest for this service so we can get you started as soon as the training becomes available or to find out more, please email us at info@housingea.co.uk with the subject Free tenant training.

Free Tenant Training Course List

18 courses available

Around the Home

- Basic Home Maintenance
- Saving Energy to Reduce Bills
- Pest Awareness
- Feeding a Family on a Budget
- What is Telehealth?

Social Issues

- Hate Crime
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Issues Surrounding Drugs
- Issues Surrounding Alcohol
- Preparing for Interviews

Using the Internet

- Starting out on the internet
- Internet Safety
- The Power of the Internet
- Getting started with Social
- Media

Community

- Gypsy and Travel Culture
- Building a Community
- Cultural Awareness
- Respect

Landscaping project at Restarick Close

Grow@Jigsaw has been working with residents and Tarka Housing Officer, Di Denning, to make Restarick Close in Bideford a prettier place!

They met to agree a new planting scheme of plants that require minimal maintenance and have colourful foliage and flowers, with the site layout. The Grow@Jigsaw team worked on five public areas of the site and cleared, dug, manured, planted and mulched. They put in more than 350 plants including varieties of viburnum, berberis, cotoneaster and Ionicera.

Ten volunteers from Grow@Jigsaw worked on the project and comments (once completed) from the volunteers included:

“Great to see it finished”

“It has made a huge difference to the estate”

“It is very satisfying to see it finished and it looks great”

Residents on the estate offered coffee, tea and biscuits and a number came to chat, one girl thanked them for making her estate ‘look pretty’

It took three months to complete and the maintenance of the area will be kept up by Grow@Jigsaw.

Pilot gardening service

Grow@Jigsaw, in partnership with Tarka, are offering Tarka residents a new gardening service (for private gardens) which will include clearing, digging, planting and cutting grass.

Please contact Grow@Jigsaw for further information.

Phone: 01237 479762

Email: grow.project@westcountryha.org.uk

The gift of giving

There are more than 10,000 people who need an organ transplant and 80% of those are waiting for a kidney in the UK. 3,000 people die each year on dialysis and a further 300 people will die waiting for a transplant.

In the south west there are 635 patients waiting for a kidney transplant and only 156 transplants took place. This growing demand for organs, combined with a severe shortage of registered donors (in part due to our 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' donation process) means we need more donors now and in the long term, better medical research for other treatments and a cure.

A transplanted kidney is not a cure, it will improve quality of life immeasurably, but after around 10 to 15 years on average, most patients need dialysis, conservative care or a further transplant.

Westward Housing Group has two staff members who experience the personal effects of kidney failure. Communications Manager, Vanessa Gray, was one of the lucky ones. She received a kidney from a gentleman who passed away but had signed a donation consent form for others to benefit from. She says, "I'm so grateful, it's been two years since my transplant and I am doing really well. Thanks to my wonderful donor, his supportive family and the

medical team in the south west. I wish more people could be helped.”

And Ami Mumford, Customer Involvement Assistant at Tarka receives haemodialysis three times a week for four hours at a time. She says, “It is a very restricting and working full time can make life very complicated. I have not real choice and just get on with it, but I have been on the transplant waiting list almost four years now and it is exhausting!”

We are sure there are many others reading this that are experiencing organ failure or are hoping for a transplant from a deceased or living donor. Please do write and tell us your story.

Would you take an organ if you needed one? Nearly everyone would. But only 29% of us have joined the Organ Donor Register, please consider joining. For more information about becoming an organ donor please visit www.uktransplant.org.uk or call the NHS Donor Line on 0300 123 2323 or text SAVE to 84118.

Call 101 For Police

You can now call Devon and Cornwall Police by dialing 101 to:

- report a non-urgent crime
- contact local Police officers
- get crime prevention advice
- make us aware of policing issues in your local area
- make an appointment with a police officer
- talk to us about other non-emergency matters

Calls to 101 cost 15 pence per call, no matter what time of day you call, whether by mobile or landline, or how long your call lasts.

People who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired can Textphone 18001 101.

Or email them at:

101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

Check out the Police Neighborhood website at www.devon-cornwall.police.uk and enter your postcode.

Remember...

The 101 number does not replace **999**, which should be used for all emergencies especially when:

- a crime is happening
- offenders are nearby
- someone is injured
- someone's life is being threatened
- immediate action is required

View from the Tenant Panel Chair

Hello again.

I hope its not too cold for you all.

The Tenant Panel is going from strength to strength with new members, it is great to see so many people getting interested in Tarka and what it does.

Recently we have had some very interesting talks at our meetings including the local Police and I would like to say thank you to all the people who've taken the time to do these.

As you all know Tarka have moved and in the new offices, we are lucky to have our own Residents Resource Room named the Darwin Room, which we certainly will be making the most of.

Tarka are currently running a whole new training programme, so if anyone has any ideas or things they would be interested in, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

The Tenant Panel are looking at ways we can use the Mobile Office which Tarka are buying. We want to attend community events and neighbourhoods to introduce ourselves, any ideas on where to visit, would be gratefully received.

As always you can contact me anytime through Tarka, I really enjoy the contact with other tenants.

Finally on behalf of us all on the Tenant Panel, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and hope we all have a much more prosperous New Year. Until next time, take care.

Julia Bowden
(reach me via 01237 428095 or via
ami.mumford@tarkahousing.org.uk)

I bet you never knew that...

Turning the Devil's Stone - Shebbear, near Holsworthy

On Guy Fawkes night, the villagers of Shebbear in Devon, turn over a six foot long stone under an ancient oak tree. While it is not known how long the practice of turning the stone has been going on for, there is a wealth of legend surrounding it and how it arrived.

One theory is that it was dropped by the devil himself when he was cast out of heaven by St Michael.

Shebbear's population works out to 161 people per square mile. Shebbear came sixth in a recent poll for the most desirable place to live, Winkleigh came first!

If anyone reading this fancies letting us know the interesting and quirky facts about their town or village, we'd love to hear from you at the usual Tarka Times freepost address or on 01803 217560.

Mike Smith

Living in Winkleigh

Voted the best village to live in

I usually write up factoids about villages in the Torridge area for your interest, but this seemed more appropriate this issue.

I have lived in the village of Winkleigh for the last four years. It has been voted top in the Family Friendly Hotspots Survey to find the best place for families to bring up children in England and Wales. Another Torridge village, Shebbear, came sixth.

It is a village on the edge of the Tarka Housing area but despite that we get great support from the Tarka Works tradesmen. The village has a great mixture of age groups from the very young right through to the older age groups.

There is a fantastic community spirit and all the shop keepers and business in the village are all very helpful.

There are annual events like the forthcoming Christmas lights switch-on to the Summer week-long fair. There is a free quarterly news booklet produced by the Winkleigh Community Group.

The views from the village towards Dartmoor can be breathtaking, when they are not covered in low cloud or mist!

The village lies between Barnstaple and Bideford to the west, and Exeter and Okehampton to the south, there is also easy access to the M5 for journeys further afield.

The village has a very busy doctor's surgery and a very highly rated preschool, infant and junior school all now on one site.

I can fully understand why the village has been voted the most sought after village to live in and I personally would like to thank anyone that has anything to do with any of the voluntary groups in the village for making it such a pleasant village to live in.

Mike Smith, resident, Winkleigh

Growing our own in Shebbear

And as you know, Shebbear was voted sixth top place to live in England and Wales!

Tarka have allowed us to cultivate the land behind the rear of our garden, which was totally grown over.

We have made a lot of headway, and are growing potatoes, runner beans, beetroot, leeks, sprouts and radish!! It has been hard work and we planted some apple trees yesterday, and we still have some land to get cleared for the next season. We have left one half natural, in order that the birds etc can feel 'at home'. Also it provides a good harvest of nettles for fertiliser and a home for insects etc.

We have three blackthorn trees in the rear piece of land we have taken over, and the sloe harvest was so good we have made three bottles of sloe gin!! They say there's a first for everything... not to mention home grown and home made sloe and apple jam... we still have 60 leeks, runner beans still going strong, the brussels sprouts are nearly ready (10

plants), 12 cabbages nearly ready, and the sprouting broccoli will be ready in the spring.

We have 2 months supplies of pots left which make excellent leek and potato soup, and have the twelve baby fruit trees down the bottom.

There are 9 more gooseberry bushes ordered, together with more raspberry canes, blueberry bushes and even more blackcurrant bushes.

We have so enjoyed clearing and working this pice of land, and although very hard work it's been great. The trees are a joy, and all in all we are so pleased.

Thanks to Tarka for the opportunity to accomplish this; it has made the quality of life really great.

Thank you Mary Edwards, Shebbear

Leek & Potato Soup Recipe

4 leeks
1 diced onion
175g peeled, boiled & mashed potato
25g butter
850ml vegetable stock
275ml milk
Seasoning

Bring all the ingredients to boil and then simmer for 15 minutes.

To serve

1 tbspn crème fraiche or double cream
1½ tbspn chopped fresh chives or parsley

I am very interested in diet. The whole point of using the land to grow vegetables is because they should be the main ingredient in our diets. It provides organic food, which contains vitamins and gives a feeling of well being. Growing your own food in gardens and allotments helps drag people away from TV and games into the fresh air!

Autumn Colouring Competition Winners

We were delighted to receive lots of entries for the Autumn Colouring competition. The winners each receive a £10 voucher and congratulations to the following winners in their age groups:

Infants: Caitlin Gubb (5), Bideford

Juniors: Kaylee Wonnacott (10), Winkleigh

Seniors: Shannon Husdon, (12) Bideford

Adults: Simon Heath, Torrington

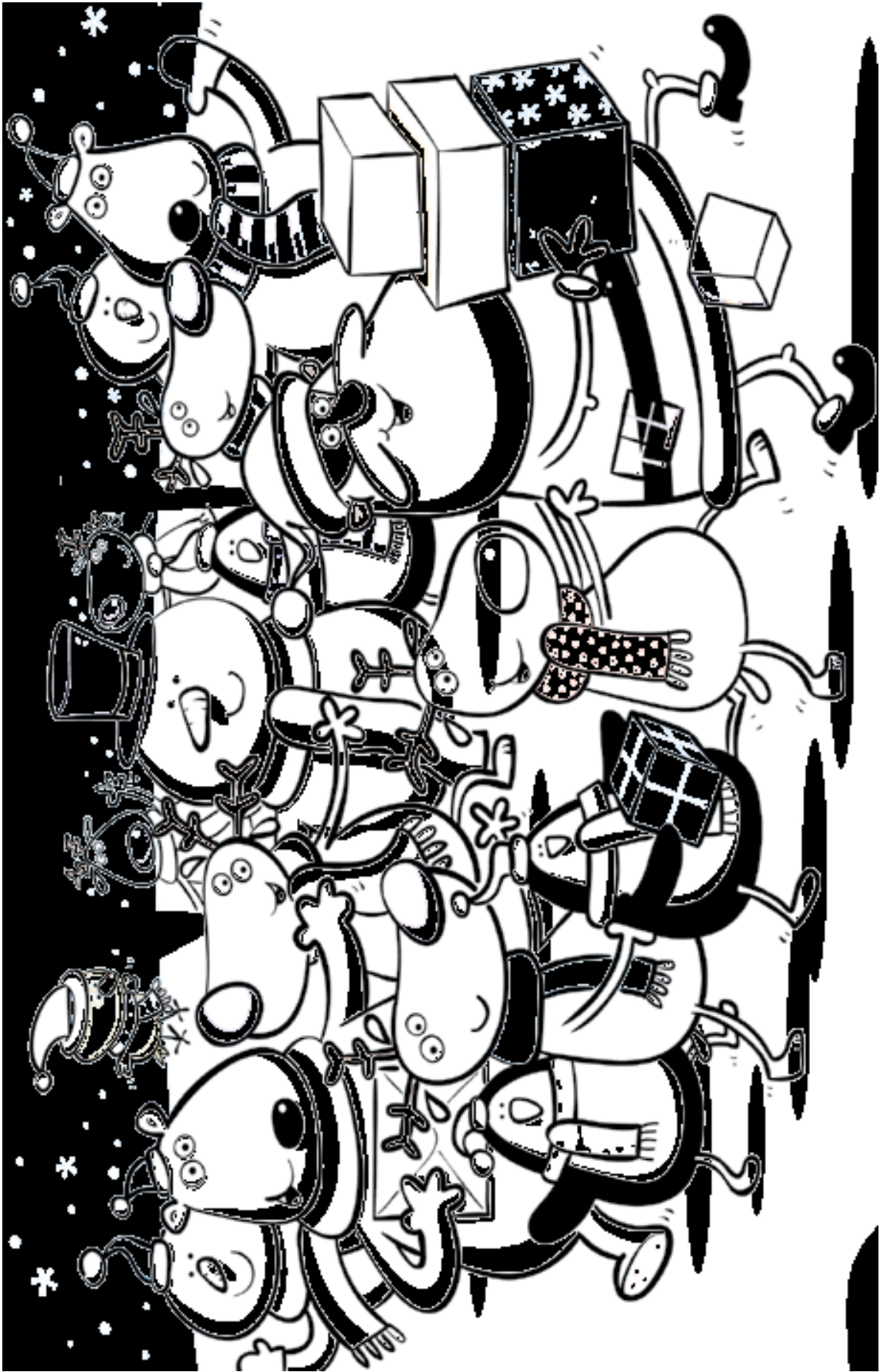
Send all entries to the Communications Team, Westward Housing Group, Freepost Plus (RSHL-HLZA-EJLC), Newton Abott TQ12 4PH by 30th Jan 2012.

Colouring Competition

To enter

Colour in the picture, fill out this form and send to the freepost address for a chance to win a £10 voucher.

Name
Age (children only)
Address
Postcode



Christmas Quiz

Win a £10 voucher

1. In which film did Bing Crosby first sing White Christmas?
2. Which country did Good King Wenceslas rule?
3. Where is Christmas Island?
4. Which conifer is the traditional British choice for Christmas tree?
5. Where was Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus) born – it wasn't Lapland?
6. Saint Nicholas is patron saint of which country?
7. Who is credited with introducing Christmas trees into Britain?
8. Which is the only book in the bible to relate the 'Christmas Story'?
9. What are the traditional names of the Three Wise Men?
10. In which country did turkeys originate?

Name
Age (children only)
Address
Postcode

Sudoku

Win a £10 Voucher

This Sudoku board has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing. Enter digits from 1 to 9 into the blank spaces. Every row must contain one of each digit. So must every column, as must every 3x3 square.

		8						
1	6					7		
		7		6	3	5	8	
		2	6		7	4	1	
			3		1			
		3	8		2	9	6	
		6		7	4	8	5	
9	5					6		
		4						

The winner of the Autumn Suduko competition Mark Parsons of Great Torrington. Well done, a £10 voucher is on its way to you!

To enter

Fill out this form and send to the freepost address below for a chance to win a £10 voucher.

Name
Address
Postcode
Age (children only)

Wordsearch

Win a £10 voucher

W	F	B	R	S	S	S	J	L	S	X	M
S	E	A	H	F	G	A	O	D	Y	L	A
T	S	U	X	V	J	N	W	Y	J	K	U
A	T	B	A	U	S	T	I	N	S	E	L
R	I	L	W	Z	B	A	Z	Q	M	M	T
S	V	E	Y	I	J	C	N	O	I	Y	L
W	E	S	H	I	E	L	O	G	J	P	T
S	N	O	W	F	L	A	K	E	S	U	U
F	O	H	Y	L	L	U	H	H	R	K	R
T	C	O	S	T	T	S	M	I	E	O	K
E	N	C	R	E	I	N	D	E	E	R	E
S	L	E	Y	U	L	E	L	O	G	R	Y

Tinsel
Baubles
Festive
Yulelog
Snowflakes
Reindeer
Santa Claus
Chestnuts
Stars
Turkey

The winner of the Spring Wordsearch competition is J.J. Gliddon of Clawon near Holsworthy, who found all 10 Halloween words on the grid. Well done, a £10 voucher is on its way to you!

To enter

Fill out this form and send to the freepost address below for a chance to win a £10 voucher.

Name
Age (children only)
Address
Postcode

Send all entries to the Communications Team, Westward Housing Group,
Freepost Plus (RSHL-HLZA-EJLC), Newton Abott TQ12 4PH by 30th Jan 2012.

Mobile office design winner

The mobile office design competition produced a wide variety of colourful and interesting suggestions. Our favourite was from P. Abrams of Holsworthy who gets a £20 prize and this is the picture. Congratulations go out to the two runners up A. Gubb of Bideford and A. Prosser (11) of Bideford who also get a prize.

We would like to thank all of you for your creative contributions which have given us ideas to work with and we will now get a designer to draft us some suggestions for the residents working group to pick from.

We all look forward to seeing the new office on the road in April of next year so in the Spring issue we'll show you what the office is going to look like!

Take care, be Gas Safe

All Tarka gas engineers are Gas Safe Registered, remember to always ask for their identification card when they visit you.

Badly fitted and poorly serviced gas appliances can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide is a highly poisonous gas. You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but it can kill quickly with no warning.

All Tarka properties have been fitted with a carbon monoxide alarm and if it goes off you should:

- Phone the Tarka repairs desk and ask for an immediate call from a gas engineer
- Turn off any gas appliances in your property
- Open as many windows and doors as possible to ventilate the property
- Stay outside, but near to the property, until the engineer arrives

Tarka will keep gas appliances in your property in good condition, arrange a gas safety check every 12 months and leave a record of the check with you.

Please help us by keeping these appointments or rebooking promptly, if we are unable to service an appliance in legal

timescales we may have to cut off the gas to it for your own safety.

Customer Satisfaction Survey winners

Christmas came early for two Tarka tenants in the form of a £50 Morrisons' voucher each.

Each quarter, one customer satisfaction survey is randomly selected from the returned heating customer satisfaction surveys, and one from the repairs and maintenance customer satisfaction surveys.

This quarter, the heating satisfaction survey completed by Mrs Morgan of Bull Hill was drawn and the lucky winner telephoned.

Chris Willmott (Property Investment Manager) and Carol Williams (Customer Service Officer) presented the delighted Mrs Morgan with her fifty pound voucher at her home on Monday, October 31st.

"I am just so grateful," said Mrs Morgan. "Tarka has always been so good to me. Such nice people. This has come just in time for Christmas. It will be a real help when my family visits."

After a tour of the new wetroom Tarka fitted this year, Chris and Carol moved on to present the second winners, Mr and Mrs Hillman of Chubb Road, with their vouchers. "This is so nice," said Mrs Hillman.

When asked what they thought they would spend the vouchers on, the two tenants said probably on regular

grocery items, but maybe they would treat themselves to some chocolates for Christmas.

In order to be included in this draw next time, tenants just need to return the satisfaction survey after a job or service has been done in their home.

Two surveys each quarter are drawn by Joshua Jackson, Head of Asset Management.

For the months of July, August and September 243 heating satisfaction surveys were sent out, 76 were returned, which is a return percentage of 37%.

For the same time period, 1394 repairs and maintenance surveys were sent out, 588 were returned, which is a return percentage of 42%.

Would you like to own your own home but think you can't afford it?

There are a number of government schemes available to help first time buyers onto the property ladder... And did you know that as an existing tenant of a social landlord you are a priority for these schemes?

The route to home ownership

Gwenda Beckley is your HomeBuy Manager at South West Homes.

Having information stands at open events and residents' days for other housing associations, local authorities and developers is a regular fixture for Gwenda.

If you're part of a residents group you can always invite Gwenda along to explain shared ownership. When you meet her you'll soon see that she really does love her job, and her enthusiasm is infectious.

To find out more information, including details of properties in your area, go to our website at www.southwesthomes.org.uk, or speak to one of our customer service advisors on 0300 100 0021. We look forward to hearing from you.

Make it your New Year's Resolution to get yourself into print!

What can we do to improve where you live?

Send us your suggestion and the winner will be published with your photo, name and win a voucher of your choice for £20.

Communications Group

Calendar

We hope you liked our annual report calendar which you received in the last issue of Tarka Times – it is specifically for you, our customer, and has been developed by your Communications Group based on staff interviews by your Scrutiny Panel and Auditors.

We have already received lots of feedback survey forms (on the calendar back page) which have been very positive and helpful – we'll put a summary in the Spring issue when we have them all. So thank you. If you haven't filled in and

returned yours do so now as you could win a £25 voucher in the new year – prize draw is on 15th January.

Web review

If you love using the internet and know what keeps someone interested and on a site, we need you.

Our new website needs a fresh new look, as well a tenant portal.

Would you like to be involved? It would just be a couple of meetings in the early Spring and we cover travel costs.

Contact Tarka's Communications Team (Vanessa or Claire) at vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk or on 01803 217560.

Photovoltaic (PV) solar panels

You may have read or seen in the media over the past few weeks. That the Government has taken the decision to cut the funding it is providing for the fitting of PV Panels to properties throughout the country much earlier than it originally said.

Sadly this means that the project will now be ending on the 12th December 2011 instead of the original proposed date of 31st March 2012.

Therefore I am saddened to have to inform residents that we will now not be in the position to fit all the proposed 700 homes with the PV panels. I have been working alongside E.on and we are trying to salvage some of the project to get at least 100 homes done in the remaining time frame.

I will be writing to all residents to inform them if they have not been successful and would like to assure you that we will be investigating other avenues on how we can assist our residents with the ever increasing costs of energy.

Nigel Barnard,
Managing Director of Tarka

Worrying About Debt

The debt help charity, Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS), provides free debt advice and debt solutions.

They will assess your situation and recommend the best solution for you, whether a debt management plan, individual voluntary agreement (IVA,) debt relief order or bankruptcy.

You can use their Debt Remedy online tool to receive personalised budgets and debt advice tailored to your specific needs.

Website: www.cccs.co.uk Telephone: 0800 138 1111

Don't risk being without a smoke alarm

Following a fright with a house fire in Pynes Lane, Bideford, residents have been asking about their safety. The fire service praised the actions of neighbours in alerting the fire service quickly, and the presence of working smoke alarms in the property clearly helped to avert a serious incident.

So don't get caught out, make sure yours is on, working and has had a recent battery test.

Board Members Column

Brian Jones interviewed Claire Hodson about what inspired her to join the Tarka Board

1. Why would you want to take on such an important job as a Board Member of Tarka Housing when it is a completely unpaid position?

Living and contributing to the community in which I live, has always been very important to me. Before I left for a new job in Cornwall, I had lived and worked in Torridge for 28 years, enjoying the challenges of voluntary work as a Guider, co-founding and running the Northam Mother and Toddler Group and being a School Governor. It is not about money, it is about people and helping in any way to share my skills in problem solving and hopefully contributing in maintaining great communities in which to live.

2. What part of the business would you prefer to get involved with?

It is early days, I am still relatively new on the Board, but I would like to think that the understanding that I have of a

wide range of housing issues will complement the talents of the existing Board. My career has encompassed services for older people, vulnerable clients, the younger persons' agenda and latterly, strategic planning for excellent housing services and development. Basically I am interested in listening to people and helping them turn ideas into real benefits for their homes and families.

3. What would you see as the biggest challenge facing Tarka at this moment in time?

I believe that Tarka and indeed social housing in general, faces many challenges in the coming months and years.

- Planning to meet the needs of the next generation of tenants with new and “really” affordable homes,
- Making sure that there is the advice and support available to ensure that new Housing Benefits payment systems do not pose problems for those experiencing money management issues
- And that the potential demand for financial organisational efficiencies are achieved without a reduction in quality services for all their customers.

4. What would you expect to achieve during your time as a Board Member?

I would hope to be recognised as a member who listens to tenants, champions opportunity for everyone to have a say in the way their homes are managed and provide encouragement and advice for my successor.

5. What are your feelings and how important do you consider Tenant involvement to be in helping shape the way Tarka is run?

Tenant involvement has to be a priority for any successful housing organisation. I believe it is critical that tenants are given every opportunity to contribute to the ways in which their homes are managed and how the future of their communities will be shaped. I also believe that it is about encouraging entire neighbourhoods to work together, whether they are tenants of Tarka, private or other housing association tenants, or owner occupiers. After all, we all want to live in the best places.

6. As a Board Member what training have you had and what sort of training would you like to be involved in the future?

As you have probably realised, I am eager to do my best as a Board Member and as such will undertake any training opportunity that will improve the way in which I contribute to the decision making for Tarka. I have already participated in training with your staff and other Members looking at ways in which organisations are run and some of the legal solutions to resolve problems. These sessions were very informative and have given me a greater insight into how Tarka functions and the challenges that it faces.

On a lighter note, I am really looking forward to being involved, meeting new people and helping to build upon the excellent work that Tarka has achieved since its inception.

The Knowledge

Mrs C.M. Clark of Hartland correctly identified David Howell as the Chairman of Tarka Housing. A voucher is winging its way to her!

The Carol Singers

Sent in by Eleanor Rogers of Northam

The moon was shining very bright,
When they set off that certain night –
They meant to sing with all their might
For it was Christmas Eve.

But soon it started up to snow,
And icy winds began to blow,
The temperature dropped very low,
And offered no reprieve.

They needed somewhere, and quite fast,
To shelter from the bitter blast,
And then, a sign of hope at last –
Outside the village inn.

The locals saw their sorry state,
And couldn't leave them to their fate
So furthermore, without debate,

They welcomed them all in.
They made them sit beside the fire –
They looked as though they might expire.
To warm them up was their desire,
So plied them with mulled wine.
The tingle started in their toes,
And carried on up to each nose,
And then their arms and legs unfroze,

Their eyes began to shine.

Some time later, still in the inn,
The world around began to spin –
They gave their hosts a stupid grin
And said they had to go.
We are a carol-singing band,
We've calls to make, you understand,
But then they found they couldn't stand
And fell in to the snow.

And so it all began again,
The singers brought inside to drain,
Their main requirement was quite plain –
They needed to refuel.
The singers didn't go away
But fell asleep just where they lay,
Till they awoke on Christmas Day
With hangovers most cruel!!

Have Your Say

Please send any suggestions for how we can improve our services to the Managing Director at the usual Freepost Tarka address on page 6.

Order your Christmas Wreaths from Grow@Jigsaw

£7.50 each

We make these lovely wreaths locally and you can collect your orders from the new Tarka Office from 12th December, or from Grow@Jigsaw greenhouses, Victoria Park, Bideford.

To order your Christmas wreath or for more details, please contact Ann or Jenni on 01237 479762 or email grow.projectwestcountryha.org.uk

Letter to the editor

Please can you convey our thanks to the team of men that came to our bungalow over the last couple of weeks to upgrade our bathroom. I'm sure that they will be pleased to hear that it is being used to its fullest and has helped with our health problems.

We are currently busy in adding all our personal effects to the bathroom and busy decorating the hallway.

Once again please thank them for all their hard work and having a laugh with both of us whilst they have been working. Also can we thank you for the parcel of items that was given to us on the last day a very unexpected surprise!

Yours thankfully
Mike and Di Smith, Winkleigh

Tarka Times welcomes contributions from all our readers (including children) - letters, articles, poems, photos, cartoons and pictures. The deadline for contributions for the next issue is **30th January 2012**.

Please send them to: Communications Team, Westward Housing Group, Freepost Plus (RSHL-HLZA-EJLC), Newton Abott TQ12 4PH

Tarka Times is produced by Tarka residents, staff and board members and published by Tarka Housing Ltd. It aims to share news and information and provide a voice for residents. The views expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of Tarka Housing. Tarka Housing Ltd is an exempt charity, registered under Industrial and Provident Soc. Act 1965 No. 30101 R.