



Granta News

Resident Consultation

Granta consults with residents through a number of forums including the Maintenance Consultation Panel.

At a recent meeting the issues discussed included contractor selection interviews, repair target times and appointments, access procedures for annual gas servicing, void standards, planned improvement programmes, out of hours service and tenant choices regarding the number of colours for wall tiles, floor finishes and kitchen units.

We discussed tenants preferences for improvements in priorities such as new kitchens, bathrooms and central heating.

Granta also provide information on contractor performance and the results from tenant satisfaction surveys. We also

ask how Granta can improve the maintenance service e.g. following a request from a tenant we are now considering appointing our own Occupational Therapist to advise on aids and adaptations to avoid the long delays caused by the usual route of referrals through the local council.

If you would like to attend a Residents Maintenance Consultation Panel meeting, or any other panel meeting, (Customer Care, Housing Management & Anti-social Behaviour, Leaseholder Issues or Editorial Matters) please contact the Housing Manager who will invite you to the next meeting. The more feedback we get, the better we can respond to your requirements.

FEEDBACK

EARLY DOORS

Last year we asked you if you would be interested in the Granta offices being open for business for longer hours than we presently operate. There seemed to be no overwhelming desire for us to change our opening times.

However, we recognise that some of our residents did suggest opening a little earlier or later on one day a week might be helpful.

Whilst the majority of those responding felt that the present arrangements suited them, we have begun to try different opening hours. **For a six month period starting from 2nd April, 2007 we are opening at 8.30am on Mondays for**

visitors and to answer telephone calls. The office will also stay open until 5.30pm every Thursday.

Throughout the six months trial we will check on how many people use the extra hour a week, and hold a review review in October to see whether or not it seems reasonable to make any permanent changes to the opening times.



Texting Tenants

Granta seeks early contact with all tenants who owe rent arrears and several methods of communication are used. We send letters, emails, carry out home visits and make telephone calls to tenants, in order to come to an arrangement for repaying the arrears. From February 2007, we started using a new method of communicating with tenants in arrears - sending text messages to tenants' mobile phones reminding them to pay the rent and asking them to contact their Housing Officer. You can reply by text as well.

Text messaging is a very fast way of getting in touch with tenants and means we can

start helping and advising tenants who may need help sooner. It also means that we can draw tenants' attention to the arrears sooner, to prevent any further delay and to try to stop the arrears getting worse. It's always better to pay your arrears sooner rather than later, because if the case goes to Court, you will have to pay our Court costs and you could even lose your home.

Since 1st September 2006, Granta has evicted 7 households for rent arrears, so please make sure you pay your rent in full and on time, to prevent action being taken against you. Therefore, if you receive a

text message from Granta regarding your rent arrears, please contact your Housing Officer immediately. Tenants will continue to receive letters, emails, home visits and telephone calls, but you may get a text message as well.

If you need debt advice, please contact your Housing Officer on 01223 576756 who will be able to help you and refer you if necessary to a more specialist agency. Granta works in conjunction with Citizens Advice and any advice you receive will be confidential and free of charge.



An Inspector Calls

All housing associations are inspected periodically to judge the standard of their services and Granta is no exception.

In July of this year, Inspectors from the Audit Commission will be spending a week at our offices and visiting some of our developments to examine how we operate, the level of service provided to our residents, and to check if we can improve in any of

the various aspects of our work.

We continually review all of our methods of operation to reassure ourselves that we are providing a good service, and one which is appreciated by our tenants and residents. We hope we can show the Inspectors this as well.

Any changes in our operation are always discussed with members of our Consultation Panels (see elsewhere in this issue for details of the latest work done by these volunteers) so you can be assured that

tenants and residents are involved in the shaping of our policies and procedures.

When the Inspectors visit Granta, they will probably wish to get the views of people receiving a service from Granta, and may either contact residents direct, or invite you to a meeting to discuss specific aspects of our services.

They will also be visiting some of our developments and may take the opportunity to talk to tenants on site. We hope you can help give them feedback.

Help with neighbour disputes

Do you have a dispute with your neighbour and find it difficult to communicate with them? Cambridge Mediation Service may be able to help you.

Granta Housing Society has an agreement with the Cambridge Mediation Service to help Granta residents resolve disputes where other methods may have been unsuccessful.

They can:

- LISTEN** to your problem.
- EXPLAIN** ways in which they can help in disputes.
- DISCUSS** a number of ways in which your views might be presented.
- HELP** gain a new perspective or resolution to your dispute.
- OFFER FACILITIES TO YOU** eg. A meeting room.

The service is free, confidential, impartial and all mediators are trained to a high standard.

Mediation does not necessarily result in a round the table discussion. Trained mediators can often help residents find solutions to their disputes by talking to each party individually. These discussions are confidential and may be able to assist residents find their own resolution.

If you live in Cambridge City or the surrounding area (South Cambs,

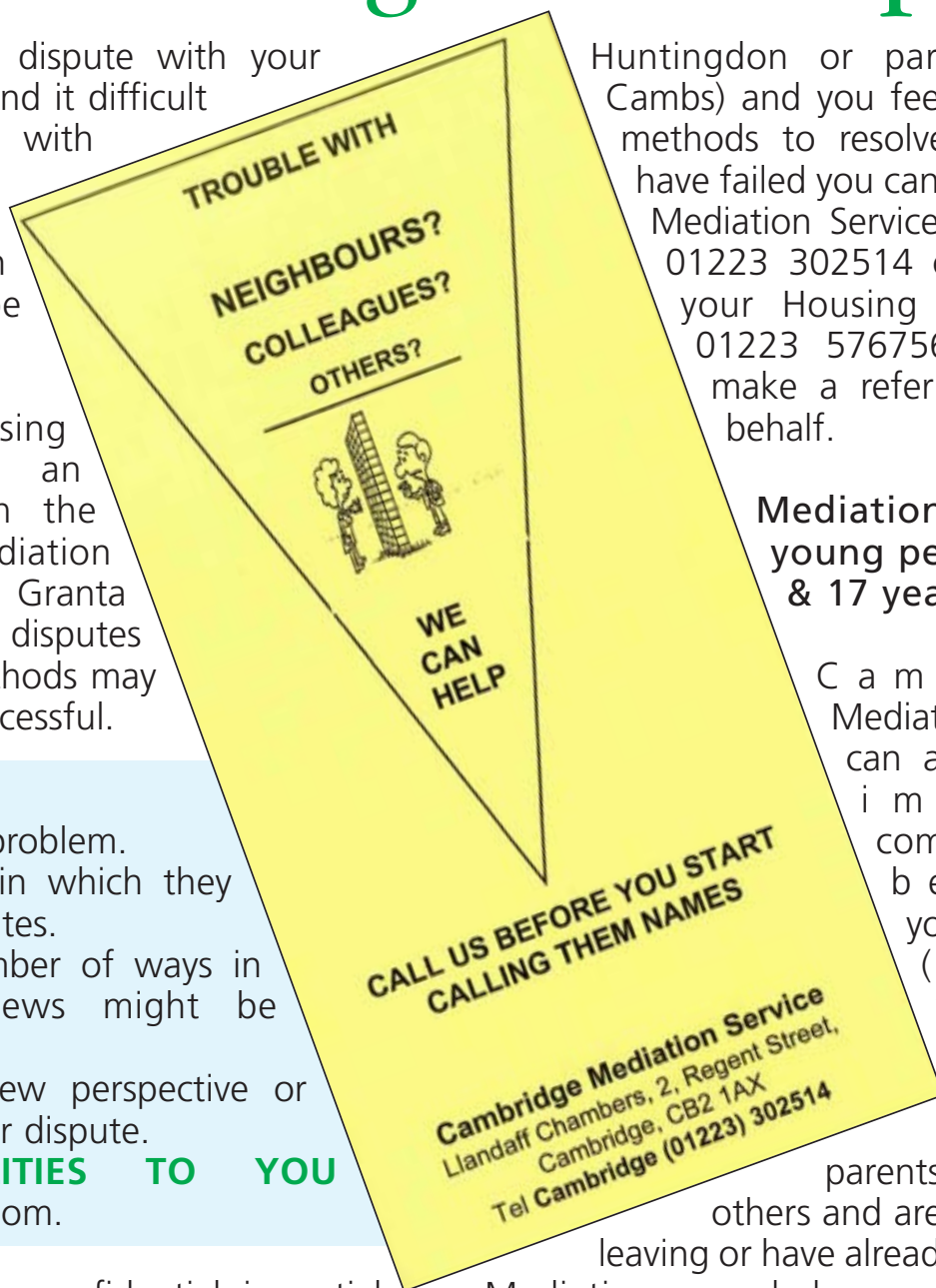
Huntingdon or parts of East Cambs) and you feel that other methods to resolve a dispute have failed you can contact the Mediation Service directly on 01223 302514 or speak to your Housing Officer on 01223 576756 who can make a referral on your behalf.

Mediation for young people (16 & 17 year olds)

Cambridge Mediation Service can also help to improve communication between young people (16 & 17 year olds) who have a problem with their parents, carers or others and are thinking of leaving or have already left home.

Mediation can help communication between the young person and their family and help them find solutions that will last.

If you live outside of the Cambridge area there may be other mediation services available to you. Please contact your Housing Officer for further details



STATUS SURVEY



Towards the end of last year a survey was sent out by an independent organisation called the National Housing Federation.

It was called the STATUS survey and is a standardised tenant satisfaction survey that is sent to Housing Association tenants all over the country. It is designed to gauge your overall satisfaction with the service we provide to you. It asked you questions about how you felt about service areas such as rent levels, satisfaction with accommodation and your neighbourhood. An impressive 470 of you filled in and returned your survey forms. Thank you every one.

We've now been given the statistics from these survey forms. It was pleasing for us to find that 86% of you said that you would recommend Granta Housing Society to others and that over three quarters of you said you were satisfied with the overall service you receive.

The findings of the survey will now be used to help identify where further improvements to services are needed. For example, like tenants of many other landlords, you identified the repairs service as being the most important and consequently the one you would most like to see improved. Learning from this since last autumn we have changed maintenance contractors and procedures bringing an improvement in repair response times: appointments are now made on the first call where possible, including contractor appointments for Saturday mornings where more convenient. It was good to find that over 40% of you felt that this newsletter, which now includes tenant input, has also improved!

It is important to us to get feedback from you about your views on the service we provide. We are now going to prepare an action plan based on the survey results and will publish this in the next edition of the Granta News. So thank you very much to all of you who co-operated in helping us to improve our service to you!

Here are a few of the compliments we have received recently on our Maintenance Service

"Well done. Very, very good. Very clean and tidy excellent. Thanks."

"The contractor was very polite, punctual and professional."

"The service was brilliant."

"I felt reassured with regard to repairs on the window of the flat."

"Richard and his team of Carl and Matt did a wonderful job installing the new windows. Richard organised access to the flat for internal work and his approach was very workable, regarding time scales. Both the carpenters were very pleasant when I arrived and helpful with the security issue. I thought you might like to know about your splendid workforce."

Resident Involvement

At a recent consultation meeting residents suggested Granta News could be improved by including some contributions written by residents. Some residents agreed to write letters to get things going, and here are the results:

"I have attended numerous meetings arranged by Granta Housing and have found them to be very interesting and constructive. All the other panel members have come from different areas of Cambridgeshire, who have had different problems, some of which have been resolved, others to be dealt with at a later date. It has been good to air our views and I can see that Granta want to achieve excellence in their services to us.

So if you have a problem, however small, and you would like it resolved – come to one of their meetings - or write to this page!"

Mrs. Doreen Ullinger
Cambridge

"In February I was invited to sit as a Tenants Representative on the panel to interview candidates for the posts of Senior Project Worker at our supported housing scheme in Baldock.

Overall I was very impressed by the way I was treated as an equal and that what I had to say was of equal value to what was said by staff.

They put me at my ease and I felt valued which was nice.

I enjoyed my day and was made very welcome. Staff were very supportive of me and were very attentive to my general comfort and other needs. I have always found the staff at Granta very easy to get on with.

I hope that the my small part in proceedings was of value to Granta."

Gillian Grimes
Letchworth.



Granta has a variety of Policies detailing the operation and service standards of each part of its business. Should you wish to see any of these documents, they can be obtained via the Granta website (www.grantahousing.org.uk) or by contacting the office, where hard copies can be provided.

Tenants on Probation

Granta is considering introducing Starter Tenancies for all new tenants who move into our houses. This does not affect you as an existing tenant but we would like to know your views before we go ahead with our proposal.

What is a Starter Tenancy?

A Starter Tenancy is a trial or probationary tenancy. It will give less rights and less protection from eviction than a secure or assured tenancy. A Starter Tenancy is normally created for the first year. At the end of the Starter Tenancy a tenant will automatically become an assured tenant if steps have not already started to evict them.

Why Introduce a Starter Tenancy?

Starter Tenancies have been found to be effective in helping housing associations manage tenancy agreements e.g. in dealing with anti-social behaviour. Eviction is always a last resort, but starter tenancies make this easier to achieve. The most common reasons for eviction include:

- causing a nuisance to neighbours;
- using the property for illegal activities;
- living in another property and/or subletting your home without the housing association's permission;
- not paying the rent.



How can a Starter Tenancy be terminated?

Granta can only bring a starter tenancy to an end by obtaining a court order for possession. At least two months' written notice must be given to the tenant that we will ask the court to evict. If we follow the correct procedure and provided we have acted reasonably the judge will have no choice but to order an eviction.

What do you think?

If you have any queries or concerns about our suggestion to introduce Starter Tenancies please contact your Housing Officer. We want to hear your views.



Granta Housing receive an Award: Best Employer for Company Training

The 4th North Hertfordshire College Business Excellence Awards were held at the Letchworth Garden City in February 2007.

Granta, an Investor in People Organisation, was delighted to win Best Staff Training award. Granta Learning and Development Advisor, Karen Canterford, received the award on behalf of the Society from former Olympic Javalin thrower, Steve Backley O.B.E.

Spotlight on Anti-Social Behaviour

In March 2007 Granta Housing Society were successful in gaining a possession order with costs against a tenant convicted of dealing illegal drugs in Cambridge.

Neighbours had reported to housing officers numerous visitors at various hours of the day and night calling at the address. This in turn was reported by Granta to the Local Police team for the Chesterton area of the city. The incidents were then logged and resulted in a flat being raided by the Police last year.

The tenant was convicted and received a prison sentence. The successful prosecution was a result of good joint

working between Granta tenants, staff and the Police. Tenants have been rewarded by one eviction from their neighbourhood of someone responsible for serious Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).



The Society is currently consulting with tenants on a new ASB Policy that reflects the Government's expectations around the "Respect Agenda" (see link below). If you want to know more and/or have a say about our proposals please contact your Housing Officer for further information.

http://www.respect.gov.uk/uploadedFiles/Members_site/Document_Library/About_Respect/Respect%20Handbook%20FINAL.pdf

Improving Services for You: 2007/2008

Granta Housing Society aims to continuously improve upon the quality and value of its services. By using feedback from surveys, tenant consultations and by comparing our performance with other housing associations we can identify areas for review and improvement.

Already for 2007/2008 we want to review various services including:

- The way we contract out our Repair Services
- Cyclical Painting Programmes
- Mechanical and Electrical Services Agreements
- Supported Housing Agency Staff Costs
- How we arrange Occupational Therapy and advice for Aids and Adaptations

For 2008/2009 we already plan to include looking at how we contract for major repairs. Are there any areas that you think we should be looking at or that would be a priority for your household? If so please let your housing officer know, or ask for the date of the next residents panel meeting, or see our website for meeting details.



Tenants Lend a Hand for New Handbook



Granta Housing Society
Tenants Handbook



Our new Tenants Handbook is due to be published this month. Members of the Residents Editorial Panel have been involved in the creation of the new handbook right from the beginning and this has resulted in the handbook being designed, formatted and sized entirely in accordance with panel members wishes. Your new Tenants' Handbook will be A4 in size and will be in the form of a ring binder, with loose leaf pages inside. Each section will be separated by a tab and the **printing will be font size 14 throughout, (in fact following this expressed preference we have also adopted larger sized print for Granta News now as well!)**

The benefits of a loose leaf format is that if we ever need to update a page or a section, we won't have to reprint the entire handbook, just the relevant page(s).

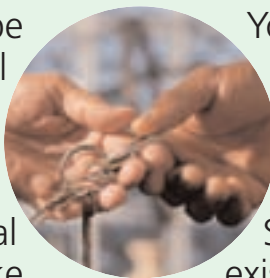
We would like to take this opportunity of thanking all members of the Editorial Panel for their contribution and you will be able to see for yourselves the fruits of their labour when you receive your brand new Tenants Handbook shortly.

Are there other areas where you think a panel could help? We are particularly interested in starting a Diversity Panel to review our services for equality issues including age, gender, disability and ethnicity.

If you would like to get involved in any of our consultation panels, please contact the Housing Manager Andrew Cole 01223 576756.

Mutual Exchange

If you wish to move home you may be able to do so by way of a mutual exchange. This would mean that you swap your home with another housing association or local authority tenant. Granta operates a mutual exchange list of tenants who would like to move. Local Authorities and other housing associations may also operate their own lists which you can look at. If you wish to join Granta's mutual exchange list you should contact your housing officer on 01223 576756. Your housing officer can also tell you what you need to do if you do find somebody you wish to exchange with.



You MUST NOT exchange without the permission of both landlords. Moves UK (Homes) – Home swap and the Homes Mobility Scheme have ceased to exist. If you were registered with one of these schemes you may wish to make a new application with an alternative mobility scheme. There are a number of mutual exchange schemes available and these may be accessed via www.direct.gov.uk/socialhousing. If you do not have direct access to the internet your housing officer will be able to give you details.

COMPLAINTS - NOW ONLINE

A new complaints monitoring system was introduced last November. Since then the Society have received 96 complaints, all but 6 of these have been resolved.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the service you have received, you can do this in a number of ways either by using the contact details on the back cover or now you can also report it by completing our online complaints form.

This can be accessed from our website at www.grantahousing.org.uk. Click on "contact us" on the website front page (in Complaints and Feedback box). Click on



the "feedback/complaints form" link at the bottom of the page. This will take you right into the online complaints form. Just complete the form and click the "submit" button at the bottom to send it to us.

Complaints and comments from you can help us to improve our services and your views are important to us. Let us know what you think!

Helping Hand from Floating Support

Some tenants require temporary or permanent support to live independently in their homes. They might need help an hour or two a week with managing their finances and budgeting or developing domestic skills, such as cooking and shopping.

Every county has a government funded "supporting people" team who can fund and arrange a programme of support as may be required for more vulnerable tenants.

Granta also has a lot of experience in this field. If you or someone you know might benefit from some "floating support" contact your Housing Officer. We can let you have a full list of the services that can be provided through floating support and put you in touch with the relevant agency for your area.

Recent News in Development

Granta's development department has been very busy!



Recently Completed Schemes are Eynesbury (38 homes); Willingham (23 homes); Thetford (4 homes); Bury St Edmunds (17 homes).



The department continues in its drive to secure more affordable homes in line with the Society's objectives. We are also developing more shared ownership homes for those who want to own their own homes but cannot afford to buy on the open market.



Schemes due for completion during 2007 include rented and shared ownership homes in Norwich, Coton, Fen Ditton and Cambourne and housing due to start on site soon at Barrington, Haverhill and again in Cambourne.

NEW SHARED OWNERSHIP HOMES



Would you like the opportunity to own your own home at a fraction of the cost?

Then why not consider Shared Ownership (part buy/part rent). A number of 2 & 3 bed houses will soon be available in Coton, Fen Ditton and Cambourne with opportunity to buy further shares later.



To be eligible, certain conditions may apply, for instance, you may need to reside or work within the South Cambridgeshire district or have a local connection. Each property comes with fully fitted kitchen, double glazing and full central heating.



We also have shared ownership 2 bedroom flats in Thetford and Norwich with a 60% share available from £72,000.

For further information contact the Sales and Marketing Officer on 01223 576756 or email info@grantahousing.org.uk

DO YOU NEED A HOUSING ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT PARTNER OR DO YOU HAVE A DEVELOPMENT SITE TO SELL

We are always seeking new development opportunities, big or small. For information please call John Edwards on 01223 702282



Working with residents for stronger communities



Our mission is "to make a positive difference to the quality of peoples lives by providing affordable housing, support and care, rooted in sustainable communities."

Granta contributes to the creation of communities and wishes to sustain these by contributing to the overall day-to-day life of these communities, together with other interested partners, including the tenants who live there.

We have a **Community Investment Fund**, which was set up to support projects aimed at bringing parts of the community together – or "community cohesion". These funds help with projects to support our **Community Investment and Cohesion Strategy**.

We have contributed to starting up a social group for older residents and providing premises for a local youth club.

We have given money for estate parties, mother and toddler clubs and tea clubs for older members of communities. We have provided premises for a gardening club. We have loaned out lap top computers to help tenants with education and employment opportunities.

Have you any ideas as to how we at Granta can help you and your neighbours become a stronger community?

Your request will need to support at least one of the eight broad themes of our **Community Investment and Cohesion Strategy**:

- Including everyone – promoting equality and celebrating diversity
- Building Respect – combating anti-social behaviour and fear of crime
- Promoting safe and healthy lifestyles
- Assisting access to safe and sustainable systems of transport
- Encouraging environmentally sustainable and efficient use of resources
- Developing financial inclusion initiatives and economic well-being to combat poverty
- Supporting education, learning and employment initiatives
- Empowering tenants in developing their own local projects to build stronger communities and combat social exclusion.

We will want to know what is involved, how much it will cost, what the benefits will be and how, afterwards, we can judge whether or not it has been a success.

Don't forget that we are here to help. If you want more information get in touch with our Housing Manager, (see back cover of this newsletter for office contact details).



Annual Gas Appliance Servicing Programme: £50 Prize Draw

It is a legal requirement that all landlord gas appliances are serviced every 12 months. Granta's appointed Corgi registered contractor writes to all tenants approximately 2 months before the date the service is due to make arrangements for an appointment at the tenants convenience. There is a very strict procedure that is followed to ensure that all gas appliances are serviced annually and we monitor this most carefully. At the moment less than 1.0% of servicing is overdue. In some instances tenants fail to provide access despite several attempts by the contractor. If all attempts fail, Granta Housing Society will put these cases in the hands of its solicitor to follow a legal process. In certain situations, some cases could end up in the County Court where warrants are issued which allows forced entry.



not burn properly, as with other fuels such as coal, wood or oil, excess carbon monoxide is produced which is poisonous. You can't see it. You can't taste it. You can't even smell it. But carbon monoxide can kill without warning in just a matter of hours.

Therefore, please remember how important it is to allow Granta Housing Society's CORGI registered contractor access to your home to allow them to service the gas appliance. **To encourage co-operation, from April those tenants that allow access on the first arranged appointment will be entered into a £50 prize draw; this will take place every 3 months.**

Every year about 30 people die in the UK from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues which have not been properly installed or maintained. Many others also suffer ill health. When gas does

If you require any further information or are worried that your gas appliance or boiler may not have been serviced in the last 12 months, please telephone Julia Robinson in our Maintenance Department on 01223 702223.

Can We Help You More?

Please let us know if you would like information sent to you in a different way. See below for further information.

Granta also offers its residents the opportunity to access information in different media to suit their needs, e.g. Braille, Larger Print, other languages, pictorial, audio tape/CD, minicom (01223 702237). For access to these services, please contact us on 01223 576756.

Where applicable this will be achieved using a variety of service providers.

Our Contact Details:

Granta Housing Society Limited
1 Horizon Park, Barton Road, Comberton
Cambridge CB23 7AF
Telephone: 01223 576756
Fax: 01223 576750
Website: www.grantahousing.org.uk
e-Mail: info@grantahousing.org.uk

