

# Berneslai Beacon

Winter 2023



## Home from home

Page 6

Visit our warm and welcoming spaces this winter.

## Every voice matters

Page 3

We love to hear from tenants and your feedback helps us to improve our service to you.

## Keep your home safe and warm

Page 7

## Top tips for a healthier, happier you

Page 5

# Welcome!

You told us that you'd like to be able to access printed information offline so we'll be making copies available across Barnsley and in your homes.

Every three months we'll bring you a new edition full of news, useful information, and opportunities to get involved and have your voice heard. We hope you enjoy reading the articles and taking part in the activities.

## We'd love to hear your feedback.

Tell us which articles you liked and what you'd like to read about in future editions. You can drop us an email at [beacon@berneslaihomes.co.uk](mailto:beacon@berneslaihomes.co.uk)

If you do use the internet, you can visit our website [www.berneslaihomes.co.uk](http://www.berneslaihomes.co.uk) at any time.

## A chat with... Ken Taylor, the new Chair of Berneslai Homes



We sat down for a chat with Ken who was appointed as our new Chair at the Board meeting on Thursday 7 December.

### As Chair of the Board, what experience do you bring to Berneslai Homes and to tenants?

I have over 25 years' experience at executive director and board level in the public, private, and voluntary sectors. I've worked in a range of areas including housing, regeneration, employment and skills, and health and wellbeing. I've always enjoyed doing work that improves the lives of others.

## Welcome to the new Chair of Berneslai Homes

We're delighted to announce the appointment of Ken Taylor as the new Chair of Berneslai Homes.

Ken has a fantastic range of experience in the public, private, and voluntary sectors and we're really pleased to welcome him to the team.

Ken is passionate about putting tenants at the centre of decision making and is looking forward to collaborating with as many of you as possible, to help improve our services to you and co-design solutions together.

Ken has written this message to Berneslai Homes tenants and customers:

"I'm delighted to be joining Berneslai Homes and look forward to working with the team to improve our services for you, with you."

...to the first edition of our quarterly newspaper The Berneslai Beacon!

"One of our values is 'customer first' which means putting tenants at the heart of everything we do and working together with you to improve services."

"My approach has always been to engage with people and understand their needs and I'll be making sure different voices are heard so that we can do this really well for everyone."

**You can read more about the ways to get involved and have your voice heard on page 3. We'd love to hear from more tenants whether that's in person or online.**



I believe that it's important for organisations to work closely together to address inequalities and strengthen communities. A partnership approach gets the best results because we can all contribute different things and support people who live and work in the areas we serve.

One of the proudest moments of my career has been helping deliver training and skills programmes which really do change people's lives for the better. One participant who had been long-term unemployed was able to access training, gain his first ever qualification, and went on to get a job with the local council. This was only made possible by bringing together different organisations to support the programme and demonstrated great partnership working in action!

### What are some of the personal qualities that are important to you?

I'm passionate about putting tenants at the centre of decision making and collaborating with them. That means creating many opportunities to really listen to people to understand their needs and lived experiences. Then it means working with them so they are involved in improving services and getting the best outcomes.

Importantly, I have a can do approach and always want to achieve tangible benefits for tenants.

Yorkshire people are known for being straightforward and plain-talking, and also being really kind and supportive to others and I think those are good qualities to have when your work affects people's homes and lives. We should be honest and transparent, say what we mean, and also bring kindness and compassion to everything we do.

### And finally, tell us a bit more about yourself.

What's your favourite food?  
Italian

What's your favourite holiday destination?  
Scotland, particularly on the west coast where the scenery is beautiful.

What's your favourite way to relax?  
I love to go for walks in the local area around Barnsley and the Peak District – we're really lucky to have such impressive countryside right on our doorstep.

Thanks, Ken!

# Every Voice Matters

Here at Berneslai Homes 'every voice matters' and hearing the tenant voice is really important to us.

We have plenty of opportunities for you to have your say and influence the services you receive, and you don't have to attend a meeting in person to get your voice heard!

We want to capture as many tenant voices as possible and encourage your feedback so we can deliver and develop high quality, accessible, and fair services to everyone.



## Here are some ways you can get involved:

- Complete a survey
- Attend one of our local engagement opportunities
- Join a Tenant and Residents Association (TARA)
- Attend a Customer Panel
- Talk to us at one of our engagement tours

Since the summer, our community engagement team and tenant voice members have been out in the community meeting tenants that wouldn't usually engage with us. We've heard from over 170 tenants from ten different areas so far – brilliant!

We've heard some great feedback about our services and communities. We also know we need to get better at some things and we'll be working on areas of concern in the coming months.



## Your feedback counts

Another way you can have your voice heard is to give us your feedback.

Whether it's good, bad, or a suggestion, we're here to listen and learn. From 1 April up to 31 October 2023 we've received:

- **647** compliments
- **287** formal complaints, and we've agreed with **85%** of them

Following your complaint, we'll put things right for you and we'll change our service to prevent the same problem happening again. Your feedback counts and we've recently highlighted 36 actions which will improve our service.



**Your said:** "I've received a letter from Penningtons telling me about a visit for a Stock Condition Survey. What does this mean?"

**We did:** We've created a section on our website dedicated to Stock Condition Surveys. It gives information to tenants on why we're carrying them out, who will be undertaking the survey, what will happen during the survey, and what the next steps are.

**Your said:** "I've been waiting for some works to be carried out to my garden, I've had to ring lots of times and been told different dates."

**We did:** We've discussed this with our partner, the council's Neighbourhood Services who carry out garden works for us. We're now providing tenants with more realistic timescales for when works will be completed.

**Your said:** "I've received a letter to say I have to 're-register' my housing application. Does this mean I've been removed from the Homeseeker list?"

## Customer Panel

Come along to our Customer Panel and let us know what you think of our services.

Each session has a different theme, so you don't have to come to everyone just one you're interested in. Recent topics have included the results of our annual satisfaction survey and The Regulator for Social Housing Consumer Standards.

We'll use your feedback from each panel to help us make decisions in our organisation, and we'll always let you know what's changed as a result of your feedback.

Visit our website: [berneslaihomes.co.uk](http://berneslaihomes.co.uk) to find out more.



**We did:** The letter is asking customers if they wish to remain on the Homeseeker list. We agreed that this is confusing and would make tenants think they would have to apply again. We've changed the wording on the letter from 're-register' to 'remain'

**Your said:** "I have some damp in my home, you said you were getting an expert company in to look at it but haven't told me when this will be."

**We did:** At the time the tenant contacted us, we didn't have a preferred damp specialist, we now have this in place. They provide us with timescales so we can let tenants know.

## Get in touch

- Phone us on **01226 787878**
- Visit our website at [berneslaihomes.co.uk/contact-us](http://berneslaihomes.co.uk/contact-us)
- Scan the QR code with your smartphone or tablet



# Support for Berneslai Homes tenants

## If you have money worries... we're here to help

The cost of living continues to affect people and we know that means everyone's feeling the squeeze. You might be worrying more about how you'll pay the bills and buy essential items.

We're here to help tenants with rising costs and we want you to get in touch, especially if you're worried about things like paying your rent or heating your home.

You might be able to get help and advice to make changes, so you have more money coming in and less money going out.



## Case study: Geoff

Geoff (\*) was referred to our service and our tenant support team looked at his finances and discovered he wasn't on the correct benefits. He'd been declined a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and we were able to help him with an appeal. Geoff's benefits were reassessed, he received a whopping £8k in backpay. He's now **£400** a month better off!

## Hardship fund - help for tenants when you need it most

In the last twelve months, we've helped over a thousand tenants either claim money they were entitled to (worth an average of **£1,160** each) or to receive support from our hardship fund in the form of gas and electricity pre-payment vouchers, or food and toiletries vouchers to use at local supermarkets.

Ask yourself:

- Is the cost of living affecting me and me household?
- Am I struggling to make ends meet?
- Am I worried about heating my home?
- Am I finding it difficult to afford food or other essential items?

If you've answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, help may be available from our hardship fund. Call our Tenants First team on **01226 774270** or email [tenantsupportservice@berneslaihomes.co.uk](mailto:tenantsupportservice@berneslaihomes.co.uk)

You'll be informed of a decision within 10 working days of receipt of a completed application. If your application is refused, we'll consider alternative options to help you during this time.



## Pension Credit

Have you reached state pension age? Do you have a weekly income below **£201.05** if you're single or **£306.85** if you're in a couple? You could qualify for Pension Credit!

Pension Credit gives you extra money to help with your living costs if you're over State Pension age and on a low income. You can start your application up to four months before you reach State Pension age or can apply any time after you reach State Pension age, but your application can only be backdated by three months.

### To apply:

You'll need the following information about you and your partner if you have one:

- National Insurance number
- information about any income, savings, and investments you have
- information about your income, savings, and investments on the date you want to backdate your application to

You'll also need your bank account details. Depending on how you apply, you may also be asked for your bank or building society name, sort code and account number.

### Apply by phone

A friend or family member can call for you if you can't use the phone.

### Pension Credit claim line

Telephone: **0800 99 1234**

Textphone: **0800 169 0133**

Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): **18001** then **0800 99 1234**

### Apply by post

To apply by post, call the claim line to request a form, then send the completed form to the Pension Service, or ask someone to do it for you: **The Pension Service 8, Post Handling Site B, Wolverhampton, WV99 1AN**

### Extra help

If you get Pension Credit you can also get other help, including:

- Housing Benefit
- a Council Tax discount
- a free TV licence if you're aged 75 or over



## Help is always available

Here in Barnsley, we're known for being tough and not always asking for help when it's needed. We want to support you, so please get in touch to find out how we can help.

If you're worried about keeping up with rent payments at the moment, call **01226 787878** and ask to speak to our Income Team. If you're worried about any other essential costs at the moment, call **01226 774270** to speak to our Tenants First Team.

If money worries are affecting your mental health and wellbeing, the Samaritans are available day or night, 24 hours a day to listen and offer emotional support to anyone who needs it. Please call **116 123** free from any phone.

# Top tips for a healthier, happier you

We all have mental health just like we have physical health and it's important that we take steps to look after it.

**We've pulled together some suggestions for each of them so you can give them a try at home, in your community, and with others.**



## Connect

Connecting to others is important for your mental wellbeing. It can help you to build a sense of belonging and self-worth.

With this in mind, why not try to do something different today to make a connection:

- Speak to someone new
- Run an errand for a neighbour or friend
- Visit your local library and join an activity
- Attend a coffee morning or community event
- Get involved with our tenant engagement events and have your voice heard

## Be active

Being more active can help improve your mental and physical health. Physical activity can lower your risk of developing or help you manage many chronic health conditions. It doesn't have to be strenuous - finding a physical activity you enjoy can really boost your mood.



Why not plan to try some of the following ideas:

- Spend some time outside gardening
- Visit a local park or green space
- Meet a friend for a walk and a cuppa in your local area
- Join a group and try a new sport or exercise

It's important to remember:

- Build up your physical activity gradually- every minute counts
- Add activities that will help you be stronger and steadier on your feet
- Limit and break up the amount of time you spend sitting still
- It's never too late to start!



## Age UK's Telephone Befriending

Everyone can feel lonely or isolated at times.

This could be because you live on your own or may be when you're caring for someone. Age UK have a service for people aged 50 and over who live in the Barnsley borough.

If you, or someone you know could benefit from a regular friendly conversation over the phone with one of their volunteer befrienders, contact them by calling **01226 776820**. You can also email [enquiries@ageukbarnsley.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ageukbarnsley.org.uk)



## Keep learning

You're never too old to learn something new!

Trying something new is an empowering and enjoyable experience. Here are some ways you can continue to build your skills:

- Join a book club to engage in discussions about various topics and discover new perspectives
- Start (or revisit) a hobby such as painting, gardening, or learning a musical instrument
- Try activities that stimulate the mind, such as puzzles, crosswords, Sudoku, and brain-training games

Remember it isn't a race and everyone learns at different speeds. Any learning is good for your mental wellbeing, whatever your pace!

## It's good to talk

If you're struggling with a low mood, it's really important you reach out and talk to family and friends if you can. Starting the conversation around mental health and wellbeing and opening up to someone can really help you. If you want someone to talk to, help and support is available in your local area and online or by telephone.

### Useful numbers

24-hour mental health helpline. South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust support and advice for your mental health: **0800 183 0558**

Samaritans: **116 123**

24 hour support service for your emotional wellbeing and mental health. You can also email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

NHS - call for mental health advice: **111**

# A warm welcome awaits you...

Once again, we've opened some of our community centres as warm and welcoming spaces where you can spend time and stay warm and well during the colder months.

This time we've created three 'home from home' spaces which are designed to be comfortable and cosy – a welcoming space to socialise, enjoy a cuppa, relax, or and take part in activities together.

These spaces were given some love by teams of volunteers from across Berneslai Homes, supported by local organisations. There are reading materials, plug in points, hot drinks, games and activities, and the chance to chat to our teams about support you may need as an existing tenant.



Our warm spaces are at the following community centres:

## Honeywell

Barnsley, S71 1PZ

Honeywell Community Centre has been turned into two distinctive areas. Downstairs in 'The bee hive' visitors can enjoy comfortable seating, activity tables, coffee tables, reading books, and hot drinks. Upstairs in 'The Treehouse' children and families can play with toys, games, and interactive areas. There's also plenty to read and space to chill and relax.

Open the first Wednesday of every month 2.30-5.30pm, then every Wednesday 12-3pm



## Our community centre makeovers in numbers!

50+

Over 50 Volunteers

7

Local Businesses

16

Supporters

120+

Over 120 Volunteers Hours



## Kirk View

Hoyland, S74 9HY

Kirk View really feels like home from home with its distinctive wallpaper and different zones. The centre now has an area for children to read and do activities as well as space for adults to relax and enjoy a warm drink and other activities.

Open the first Tuesday of every month 2.30-5.30pm, then every Tuesday 1-4pm



## Maltas Court

Worsbrough, S70 4QG

Maltas Court has all the cosy vibes with a well stocked library area and comfortable seating, space for children's activities, and plenty of soft furnishings to keep you warm!

Open the first Thursday of every month 2.30-5.30pm, then every Thursday 10am-1pm

## Keep warm & safe

As well as these welcoming spaces, Barnsley Museums and Barnsley Libraries are available for anyone to drop into when needed as warm and safe spaces. They're also running lots of different events and activities during this winter, which you're welcome to attend.



# Keeping your home safe & warm

During the colder months, it's a good idea to make sure that your home is not just warm and inviting, but also safe.

Here are some top tips to make this a season of cosiness without compromising safety.



## Heating and cooking

Keeping warm over the winter months can help to prevent colds, flu, and more serious health problems such as heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia, and depression.

Ideally you should heat the rooms you use regularly (like your living room and bedroom) to a temperature of at least 18 °C. This is particularly important if you have reduced mobility, are 65 or over, or have a health condition, such as heart or lung disease.

If you're worried about money and heating your home, please contact our Tenants First team on **01226 787878**. There's help and support available.

## Safety checklist

- ✓ Keep your home warm enough and get in touch with us if you're worried about the cost of living
- ✓ Keep heaters away from anything that could catch fire
- ✓ Never leave cooking unattended
- ✓ Double check that the oven/ hob is off when you've finished preparing food



## Northern Powergrid and Northern Gas Network Priority Services Register

Power cuts or an interruption to your gas supply can be worrying, especially if you or someone you care for is vulnerable.

You could benefit from joining the free Priority Services Register if you, or someone you care for:

- is medically dependent
- has a chronic or serious illness or mental health care needs
- has poor mobility or other disability
- is elderly or with young children
- has trouble communicating

They will give you extra support or advice in a power cut or interruption to your gas supply. To find out more about the service or to join, call Northern Powergrid on **0800 169 2996** or the Northern Gas Customer Care Team on **0800 040 7766** and select Option 4 when you hear the recorded message. If you have a different supplier for your gas and electricity, you'll need to contact them both.



## Help with hoarding

Hoarding is when someone collects many items that are too much to store. They end up with unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no value.

Hoarding can significantly increase the chances of having a fire. If you, or someone you know is struggling with hoarding, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk in your home.

## Safety checklist

- ✓ Don't place flammable items, such as clothes or newspapers, on or near heaters, lamps, or other electrical equipment
- ✓ Keep your cooking area clean and free from clutter – especially your hob
- ✓ Keep your escape routes free and plan how you'd get out in the event of a fire
- ✓ Be extra careful with candles or use LED tealights instead



## Local support

If you're struggling with too much stuff, finding it hard to cope, or hoarding is affecting your life, you're welcome to attend D'Clutter Club, a hoarding support group run by Barnsley Safeguarding Adults Board.

The group is free to attend and open to friends, family, and supporters. There's no need to book. These sessions aim to provide support, resources, and a non-judgemental space for individuals dealing with hoarding challenges.

Sessions are held on the last Tuesday of every month, 6-8pm at the Library @ the Lightbox 1 The Glass Works, Barnsley, S70 1GW.

# Warm homes fit for the future

We're investing in your homes to make sure they are warm, safe, comfortable, and fit for the future.

Our Capital Investment Programme for 2023/24 is delivering an ambitious scope of improvements across our housing stock, bringing lots of benefits for tenants and the environment. The programme demonstrates our commitment to provide decent homes for you, which are more efficient and will help to reduce your energy bills.

Overall, the programme aims to deliver improvements to over 1,000 properties, replacing where necessary:

- boilers
- energy efficient LEDs
- loft insulation
- cavity wall
- external wall insulation
- PVCu doors and windows

Here's Amanda Garrard our Chief Executive, and Arturo Gulla, Executive Director of Property Services at a site visit where we're carrying out retrofit works to 70 council properties, as part of the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Scheme.



Here are some potential annual savings passed directly to you (\*):

- Condensing boiler (D rated) £200
- Energy efficient LEDs £40
- A rated double-glazed window £155
- Loft insulation (270mm top up) £25
- Wall insulation: £360 (External/internal) £265 (Cavity)
- Solar Photovoltaic panels £400

(\* Source: Energy Saving Trust per property, per year, based on a semi-detached house (October 2023 fuel prices)



# We're pleased to be supporting this important local campaign



Don't be caught in two minds. You could be having a stroke.

Having a stroke is serious and can happen to anyone at any time. Research shows Barnsley people are not acting FAST to get vital life-saving treatment within the critical 4½ hours after a stroke.

If you're suddenly experiencing any of these symptoms that are not normal, then call 999 as soon as possible.

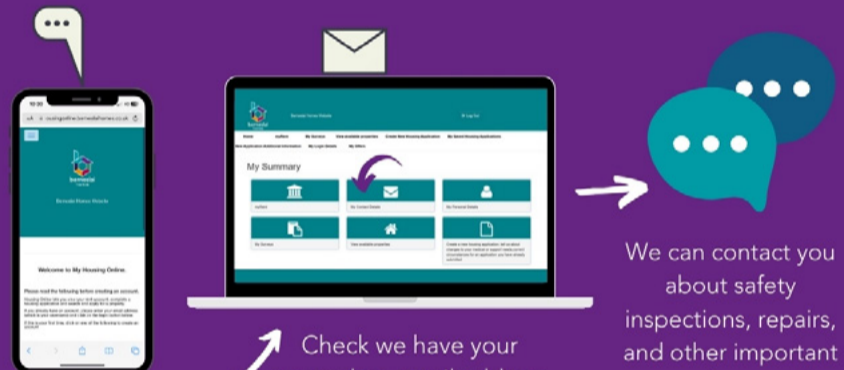
Facial droop. Arm weakness. Speech changed. Think Stroke.

**ACT FAST  
CALL 999**



## Get connected... stay connected

If you have a mobile number and / or email address...



Create or update your Housing Online account

Check we have your up-to-date email address and mobile number

We can contact you about safety inspections, repairs, and other important appointments!

[www.berneslaihomes.co.uk/getconnected](http://www.berneslaihomes.co.uk/getconnected)



# Contact us

Find us online

We hope you've enjoyed reading our newspaper. If you have internet access at home or on a smartphone or tablet, you can keep up with all the latest news online too!

Our website is full of useful information and is available 24/7 at [berneslaihomes.co.uk](http://berneslaihomes.co.uk)

Find us on social media

[facebook.com/berneslaihomes.page](https://facebook.com/berneslaihomes.page)

[Instagram.com/berneslaihomes](https://Instagram.com/berneslaihomes)