



Blackpool

Autumn 2008



My name is Barbara Stephenson and I am the Community Housing Officer for the Blackpool Area. I have worked for Muir Group for almost three years and have worked in housing for 15 years. My responsibilities include providing you with a good service when you need help and advice about housing issues including:

Moving house,
Repairs and Maintenance,
Neighbour problems,
Resident involvement
And many more subjects.

I will have met some of you when you signed up for your property and others at one of the many activities/ events we hold throughout the year.

You may have seen me carrying out scheme walkabouts on Grange Park with other members of the local Reassurance Plus team (we are the ones in the high visibility jackets).

If you haven't, look out for me soon in your area. I will be sending out letters to let you know when I will be in your street and you are welcome to join me if you like.

This year in May we held a wonderful event in the Kent Road-Erdington Road area. We supplied, planted and hung 120 hanging baskets in Kent Road and Erdington Road with the help of members of the local community. The day was a huge success and certainly brightened up the place. We intend to do it all again next year.

We also held some events leading up to and on National European Neighbour day this year. We had a lovely food tasting event at St Heliers day centre in which the local children got to sample some unusual European foods. Let's see what we can plan for next years' event. Ideas are very welcome.

As you all know I can be contacted on the usual Muir Group number or by e mail at barbara.stephenson@muir.org.uk. I'm sure all of you are aware that we will be moving offices in the not too distant future - we will let you know in good time!!



Anti Social Behaviour

As part of my role working in Blackpool I work in partnership with many different agencies. One of these partnerships was brought together a year or so ago so that housing and other agencies could meet to discuss ways to improve the service we provide to you.

We initially called this group the Respect Forum but it has now evolved into a group known as Housing in Partnership. We meet every 6 weeks or so and have devised some really useful tools that we can use to help make where you live safer and more comfortable. Some of things we have done so far :

Devised several tools that we can use to tackle minor nuisance and anti social behaviour such as acceptable behaviour contracts, parenting contracts. I have used these successfully on several occasions and have found that, quite often, where children are misbehaving, the parents are happy to receive help and support from us sometimes in conjunction with the police. If we give a child who is behaving badly some boundaries it often works to focus their behaviour into something more constructive, like sport. On Grange Park and other areas, where the partnering work is strong, agencies will get together to work on a specific case until solutions are found. This often identifies specific needs of children and help and support can be given.

We are currently working on:

Good Neighbour Agreements - The idea behind these is to unite the community against bad behaviour and ASB and also to take pride and ownership of the communities in which you live.

You will get to decide what the problems are, if any, and make changes to rectify things. Also it could be about improving things such as landscaping and the environment.

The agreements will work and be devised in conjunction with residents and will consist of anything you want. Each good neighbour agreement will be different depending on what you come up with. If you sign up to an agreement one idea is that you can then put a sticker in your window to let the community know that you are on board. I will be contacting you soon with details. Not all areas need them and not everyone may want them. That's what the consultation is about!!

Also being worked on at the moment is a way to help people who are suffering neighbour nuisance or disputes to mediate and get life back to normal. Mediation has always been a tool that landlords have used in difficult cases where relationships between neighbours have broken down but, as a group, we are trying to come up with a specific plan/procedure so that we can train our own staff to mediate each others cases. This will save money and time and resources and is another great way to partner. It should mean a much better/quicker service to you.

Victim and witness packs are being devised to help us get it right when you have helped us tackle Anti Social Behaviour in your area. All the agencies are pooling their knowledge and a booklet is being devised for information and action.

So as you can see it is a busy group. I will keep you informed about any advances in all these things in the next issue.

Patch Plans

We are publishing Patch Plans for the start of the next financial year (April 2009). There will be a Patch Plan for each Community Housing Officer and they will cover all of the neighbourhoods managed by that Community Housing Officer.

Your Patch Plan will provide you with information on programmed works which are planned for the coming year, so you will be able to see if and when you will be getting any improvements such as kitchens and bathrooms or painting to communal and/or external areas. It will also tell you when we are coming to inspect your estate, so that you have the opportunity to come along on the inspection.

The Plan will also tell you other information about the patch, such as feedback from the estate inspections; improvements to estates; activities being arranged; opportunities for resident involvement and general news affecting you.

Fly tipping

Please ensure that you do not dump rubbish in your neighbourhood. We increasingly have to collect and dispose of articles which have been dumped such as sofas, TVs, car parts, etc. Not only can these items be unsightly, but they can also be dangerous. It costs us, and ultimately you, to have such items removed and disposed of. Fly tipping is illegal and can lead to the local authority taking court action against those responsible. Such action could result in a fine of up to £50,000 at Magistrates Court, or an unlimited fine at Crown Court, and/or a prison sentence of up to 5 years. If we identify any residents as being responsible for fly tipping, we will recharge them for any costs that we incur. We can also take action for breach of tenancy.

Knock Knock, Who's There?

In 2009 we will be starting a programme of tenancy audits. A tenancy audit is a visit to you at home which allows you to talk to us about any issues that you have, as well as giving us the chance to make sure that our properties are being looked after and that all the tenancy conditions are being maintained.

If a member of our staff, or one of our contractors, does visit you at home, they will show you their identification card (ID). You should always check the ID of anybody who calls on you at home and if you are unsure who they are and why they are visiting you, you should not let them in unless you are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Appointments for Repairs

As part of our new partnership with our Responsive Maintenance Contractors, we have introduced an appointments system for repairs to the inside of your home from the 16th September 2008.

When you report a repair to our Customer Service Team they will offer you an appointment, where applicable.

You can choose a morning, midday or afternoon slot for a specific day for the contractor to attend to complete your repair. Where it is not possible for you to be at home during normal working hours we will be able to offer a limited number of appointments for a Thursday evening or Saturday morning.

You can report a repair by calling the Customer Services Team on 01928 728000.

Noise Nuisance

If you are suffering from anti-social behaviour caused by noise nuisance, it is essential that you contact the Environmental Health Department at your local Council, as well as contacting us at Muir. You will be asked to complete diary sheets in order to supply evidence of the problems.

FOMG, Who & What

Friends of Muir Group (FOMG) is a registered charity formed by Muir Group Housing Association in 2002. Its main purpose is to reflect Muir Group's commitment to investing in our communities.

Friends of Muir Group supports community projects and initiatives that benefit the communities in which Muir Group residents live. Friends of Muir has already made a positive difference to schemes, communities and neighbourhoods across our regions by providing funding to get projects off the ground and to keep them going.

Amongst the brilliant community projects that FoMG has given grants to this year are:

A gardening group for people with learning difficulties; National In Bloom Project; Community Adult Learning Days and Friendship Groups; Community Safety Days; Social Outings throughout the regions; school projects; play schemes; anti-bullying campaigns; community recycling.

Friends of Muir Group Board meets four times a year to make decisions on shaping the future of the charity and to approve grant applications. The next meeting is on the 9th December, all bids to reach Beverley Price by 26th November 2008. For further info or assistance call 01925 790624 or 07717 300036 email beverley.price@muir.org.uk.



Getting Involved

You can influence the way that Muir Group operates and how we deliver our services to you. Maybe you have an idea or can use your personal experiences to help us to improve.

It really doesn't matter how much time you have available or what your experiences are, as we believe that everyone can make a valuable contribution just by getting a little more involved, and we have a wide range of ways to suit your time and commitment.

Some of these are, becoming a board member; attending our Task and Finish Groups; or becoming a member of our Think Tank. Ask for a copy of our resident involvement fact sheet which tells you all about them.

You can also have an impact in your own local community by getting more involved with local issues or projects. Perhaps you have a great idea for a new project, want to start up a residents group or get the community together to solve a local problem. We can help to get you going, and support you as and when you need it.

For more information please contact your local Community Housing Officer or alternatively, you can speak to your local Community Engagement Officer. Beverley Price for the North & Northwest regions on 01925 790624/07717 300036 email: beverley.price@muir.org.uk; or Jan Kaneen for the Southern region on 01480 492988/07717 300061 email jan.kaneen@muir.org.uk.

Resident Involvement

It's been a busy year so far for Resident Involvement. As I mentioned before we have had some interesting events but Resident involvement is not just about events. It can also be about helping individuals too.

I have recently begun working with a child in one household who has shown an interest in doing the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award. A Friends of Muir Group bid has been submitted so that equipment can be bought in order to make it possible for this child to take part. We are waiting to see if this has been successful.

Last year a bid was granted in order to help fund a child who needed assistance to fulfil his dream in sports training.

Assistance has been granted to help pay for books/equipment in order to assist residents who want to learn the English language at college where English is not their first language.

New Rubbish bins have been put in on Grange Park after consultation showed that you wanted them. Fencing has been funded to aid security in one area as a direct result of resident involvement.

A new residents Association has been set up with the help of Muir Group in central Blackpool.

There are many things going on and I invite you to offer your opinions and thoughts on any resident involvement issue that you like.

If you have any good ideas about events/schemes for the future let me know.

