Orbit East’s Residents’ Open Day in Norwich

Top tips for a debt free holiday season

Lowestoft Town’s Craig Fleming opens Compass Street

Welcome to Launchpad online

Tell us what you think of Your Orbit for a chance to win £50
Tell us what you think of Your Orbit and you could win £50 in shopping vouchers

Last Spring, we introduced a brand new look for Your Orbit and we hope you’ve noticed the improvements we’ve made to your magazine. We would like to know what you think about the changes, so we’re offering you the chance to win £50 worth of shopping vouchers. All you have to do is answer the following questions:

- What do you like best about Your Orbit and why?
- What do you like least and why?
- We produce four editions of the magazine per year. Is this too many? Too few? About right?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving Your Orbit?
- Would you like to receive it in a different format – ie. social media, online or by email?

We’ll make the prize draw from all of the entries received by Friday 31 January 2014. Just email your responses to orbiteastcommunications@orbit.org.uk or mail them to Orbit East Communications Team, Fourth Floor, Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1RY.

---

Nine residents have been chosen as winners for this year’s Brian Griffiths award, with one from Orbit East.

The Brian Griffiths award, named after a late Orbit Board Member who dedicated his life to helping others, offers residents access to a £10,000 fund to help them achieve an aspiration or goal.

The applicants were asked to outline how the funding would support their learning and personal development, or give them the opportunity to do something extra in their lives. This year’s chosen winners will be using their share of the funding for courses or certificates in anything from driving instructing to dental radiology, teaching and catering.

When asked how this funding would change their life, the Orbit East resident, from Norwich, says; “I have been volunteering at the local school. Completing the Teaching Assistant NVQ will hopefully allow me to get back into work with a job that I enjoy, after spending ten years looking after my children. Working in a school would also fit well around my family commitments.”

All of the winners will be presented with their award at the Customer First awards ceremony this month.
Residents’ Open Day

2013

Orbit East holds second successful resident open day in Norwich

Orbit East residents, volunteers and staff enjoyed a second annual resident open day in Norwich on Saturday 19 October. The event gave residents the opportunity to find out about how their voice can influence what we do and how they can become more involved in their community.

It also provided attendees with more information on the type of support we can offer to make a difference to individuals and neighbourhoods through many of the projects and groups Orbit has available. In addition, residents were able to participate in taster sessions on digital inclusion and supporting people into learning, volunteering and employment.

The day proved a hit with residents and their families who chatted with staff and signed up to the many initiatives open to them to become involved in their community. Those attending were encouraged to explore several interactive zones and share views about issues facing residents living in their area and contribute to how Orbit is ‘building communities’.

If you weren’t able to attend the day but would like to know more about how you can get involved, please just contact the Customer Involvement Team on 0345 600 2535.

We would love to hear from you!
2020... The journey so far!

We launched our 2020 vision earlier this year and in the first six months, we have made real progress! We have concentrated on ‘getting it right first time’ by improving some of the basic services that you told us needed fixing. We have also started to develop some exciting and new projects to drive us forward to 2020. Here are just a few of them:

**Repairs**
You said our repairs service needed to improve and we’re working hard to do just that. The number of repairs appointments booked from the first call is up from 30% to 80% thanks to Customer Experience Reviews. We will also be improving our processes to be able to resolve customer queries first time around and at the first point of contact.

**Energy efficiency**
We all want warm homes that are cost efficient to run and by 2020, we want all our homes to achieve an average home SAP* rating of 75 and minimum energy rating of C. *SAP is the UK’s national standard for calculating the amount of energy a building uses.

**More ‘online’ facilities**
We are launching a new website in 2014 and it will give our residents many more ‘self serve’ options to manage their accounts or log a repair request online. We want to help more of our residents get online via training and by recycling computers into community projects. By 2020 we want 75% of our residents to use self-service facilities via their PCs or smart phones.

---

**Top tips for a debt free holiday season**

Whatever your view of the holidays, there’s one thing we all know – it’s going to cost us money. For many families, their enjoyment of the season is spoiled by the worry of how they are going to afford all the extra spending.

Here are some of the top tips to help you keep your spending under control:

1. **Talk to your partner, family and friends about holiday spending. Chances are they want to keep the costs down too, so you can all agree to spend less on each other. Homemade gifts cost less and are fun to make!**

2. **Make a plan for all your festive spending, not just the presents. Think about what worked and what didn’t last year. How many of those ‘stocking fillers’ were forgotten about or broken two minutes later? How much of all that ‘bargain’ festive food was thrown away, or not eaten?**

3. **Make a list of all the bills that have to be paid every month, whether it’s the holidays or not. Work out how much spare income you have and then make sure you put some aside for emergencies before you start on your holiday shopping list.**

4. **Manage your children’s expectations – there may be different ways to achieve what they want. Perhaps you can afford to pay half the monthly payment on that smartphone if they get a Saturday job to pay the rest?**

5. **Think even further ahead. If someone is going to need a new sports kit, could you buy it in the sales and stash it away for next Christmas?**

6. **If you think you might struggle this year, get help now. Talk to a free, independent debt charity like Debt Advice Foundation, where advisers will help you check for any help you’re entitled to and put together a clear financial plan. Their helpline is 0800 043 40 50, or you can visit www.debtadvicefoundation.org**

---

0345 600 2535  www.orbiteast.org.uk  info@orbit.org.uk
Lowestoft Town’s Craig Fleming officially ‘cuts ribbon’ at Compass Street

Craig Fleming, Director of Football at Lowestoft Town Football Club, has officially opened our affordable new housing development at Compass Street in Lowestoft.

Building contractor, Dove Jeffrey, joined forces with Orbit East to host the event at the 23-property development, which transformed part of the former Waveney District Council offices and High Street car park into homes - including 12 one and two bedroom flats for smaller households and 11 family houses.

The opening ceremony provided an opportunity for residents, local authority leaders and our partners to meet the construction team, councillors and Orbit East staff – and to enjoy chatting to local football celebrity Craig Fleming!

Paul High, Executive Director of Orbit Homes, says; “This was an ideal opportunity to showcase the hard work and expertise demonstrated by all involved in the project. We are very proud that these high quality new homes will provide affordable accommodation to the people of Lowestoft for many years to come.”

You could reduce your energy bills by using My Home Energy Switch

My Home Energy Switch is an energy supply service from the National Housing Federation to help residents reduce their energy bills. This service is completely free and impartial and on average, customers save £72.84 on their energy bills.

How does it work?
All you need to do is call 0800 0014 706 or go to www.myhomeenergyswitch.org.uk with your postcode and a current energy bill. The My Home Energy Switch team will do the rest.

If you would like to register your interest or have any questions about the service, please contact the team today on 0800 001 4706, visit the website above or email voids@billscutter.com.

Would you like Your Orbit in a different format or language? Contact us on 0345 600 25 35
Changes to the way we manage complaints

January 2014 will see the launch of Orbit’s revised Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure, which has been approved by our customers and Boards.

Key changes are:

- We have reduced the number of levels within the complaints policy from three, down to two - Investigation and Review. The reason for this is to make the process quicker and simpler for the complainant.

- We will only deal with complaints no older than six months.

- Introduction of a complaints review group, which will include Orbit staff and residents. This will be set up in the Spring to ensure that Orbit learns from its complaints. The group will monitor trends, learning and ensure that Orbit makes the changes it says it will.

More details can be found in the policy which will be available from January 2014. You will be able to find it on our website or by contacting our Customer Service Centre and requesting a copy. Leaflets will also be available at local offices.

Learning Curve

We constantly review the feedback we get on our services, especially where we get it wrong and a formal complaint is made. Our aim is to learn from it and most importantly, change things so we get better and you get an improved service.

These are just some examples where things had gone wrong. We reviewed each complaint, learnt from our mistakes and made changes.

We have:

- Reviewed our allocations process. This is to ensure we are clearer with our customers at the time of viewing a property, as to our position in changing any existing adaptations in the home. This will allow customers to have a better understanding of what to/or not to expect when accepting one of our homes which has been adapted.

- Tightened our processes in dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour and hate crime incidents. Staff have been retrained on managing anti-social behaviour. We ensure we agree an action plan with residents that confirms communication and follow up procedures, along with calling multi-agency meetings if needed to agree a joint approach.

- When investigating a formal complaint, we recognise we should not just focus on the complainant but consider whether the complaint raised has also impacted on anyone else, neighbours etc. When considering how to put things right, we look to see how we can put right for others.

We also record and monitor any compliments you may have about staff members or the service you receive from us or our contractors. Please don’t forget to share any positive feedback with us by contacting our Customer Service Centre.

Gas Servicing

Hundreds of people each year are affected by carbon monoxide poisoning and some die but proper servicing and maintenance can prevent this.

Keep your family safe. A free appointment could save lives.

For that reason it’s vital that you give us access to your homes when we need to test your gas supply and equipment. Each year a considerable amount of time and money is spent attempting to gain access to residents’ homes.

If you receive a reminder letter, contact us to book your appointment.
Because there are never enough affordable homes available for people who need them, making sure our homes go to the right people is more important than ever. We’ve appointed a Tenancy Fraud Officer to investigate possible cases of tenancy fraud and since that time, we’ve been successful in getting 14 homes back from people who were fraudulently using their social tenancy. These homes have now been re-let to families who need them most.

In October, the officer responded to a resident with an update about a previous case they had reported. The resident suggested that different tenants of another flat had also sub-let their home. The tenants in question were making a lot of noise and disturbing their neighbours, so we followed up on the situation to deal with the anti-social behaviour - but also to learn more about the suspected illegal sub-letting.

A credit check was carried out and showed the tenant on the tenancy agreement was not living at our property. We also found out they had made a fraudulent housing application to the local council and applied for a home that wasn’t needed. A visit was carried out and through questioning and warnings to the sub-tenants that a false statement would amount to fraud, they confirmed the tenant had left the country two years ago and was living and working abroad. Notice was served and the occupants were given four weeks to vacate the home. They moved out and also paid the full amount due on the rent account.

If you suspect that someone in your community is renting their home illegally, we want to know about it. Just contact our Customer Service Centre by emailing info@orbit.org.uk or calling 0345 600 2535.
Community minded residents in Bishop’s Stortford

Clean up their neighbourhood

Kirsty Martin, an Orbit East resident living at The Aspens in Bishop’s Stortford, East Hertfordshire wasn’t happy with the amount of rubbish that had been littered about in her community, so she decided to do something about it.

She encouraged her son, Louis, to help organise a litter pick and together, they got some young people from the community to go out with them to gather up all the rubbish. They collected a whopping seven bin bags full of litter!

Orbit East Neighbourhood Officer, Annette Emberson, was so impressed by the community spirit shown by the group that she delivered a bouquet of flowers to them to thank them for their efforts.

Pictured above are (left to right) Kirsty Martin, and her helpers, Louis, aged 13, Sophie, aged 16, Chloe, aged 14, Robert, aged 10, and Archie aged five.

Fire safety in the home...
Did you know?

• You are four times more likely to die in a fire if you don’t have a smoke alarm that works
• 21 people die each year because the battery in their smoke alarm was flat or missing at the time of the fire
• Around half of home fires are caused by cooking accidents
• Three fires a day are started by candles
• Every five days someone dies from a fire caused by a cigarette
• Faulty electrics (appliances, wiring and overloaded sockets) cause around 6,000 fires in the home across the country every year.

To help you reduce the risk of fire in your home, we have worked with the London Fire Brigade to produce a ‘Fire safety in the home’ guide for residents. It contains useful tips on how to help keep you and your family safe.

You can view a copy of the guide on our website by using the QR code below, or calling the Customer Service Centre and requesting a copy.
Welcome to LAUNCH PAD online

Welcome to LAUNCH PAD online

More benefit money available!
Have you been affected by the new housing benefit rules about under occupation or the benefit cap? If so, you might qualify for a discretionary housing payment. As long as you receive a small amount of Housing Benefit, you are entitled to apply for this payment from your local council. The Department for Work and Pensions has recently made £35 million more available to councils, so even if you have applied before and been unsuccessful, it is well worth applying again – you have nothing to lose! Rules differ from one council to another, so contact your Housing Benefits department for details.

Under-occupation (or Bedroom Tax) latest
There have been a number of successful appeals by people who have lost benefit because they are deemed to have spare bedrooms. Recent cases have involved families where someone has a disability and need their own room, or cannot use a bedroom because they use it to store medical equipment. The rules are complicated and changing all the time, so if you think you have been treated unfairly you should ask your council for a review of their decision. We can help you as we have developed some standard letters for a range of differing reasons. Please contact your Income Team for more details. It is up to you to appeal and you must keep your rent account up to date even if you are waiting for an appeal decision.

Benefit Cap
The cap to the amount of benefits any household can receive has now been rolled out across the country. If you are affected, your Housing Benefit department will let you know. This is because any cuts to benefit as a result of the cap are applied to Housing Benefit. The benefits department do a regular check with the Department for Work and Pensions, so there is no requirement for you to work out the total amount of your benefits added together. You must remember to tell your local council about any change of circumstances, or you may be overpaid.

Orbit East set up the Launch Pad programme to help unemployed residents or those looking for a career change. The programme is designed to assist residents to develop the skills they need to significantly boost chances of getting a job, voluntary work and training opportunities. Since April 2013, we have helped over 250 residents to improve their career opportunities.

To develop Launch Pad further, we have partnered with Hays recruitment to offer an online resource with 10 expert training modules via interactive videos, including CV writing, interview techniques and the hidden job market. It also helps residents access a live job search facility and links to useful resources.

We are delighted to provide this user friendly, online resource which is an ideal tool for you to use at your convenience from any internet connection, at home or at a community venue.

To get online with Launch Pad, please send an e-mail to launchpad@orbit.org.uk and include your name and address, and we will send you a username and password.

Would you like Your Orbit in a different format or language? Contact us on 0345 600 25 35
How we’re doing

July - September 2013

We work hard to deliver a ‘Customer First’ service to you and one of the ways we measure our progress is through the collection of key performance information from across Orbit. So see below for how we’re doing or check our website for full details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current rent arrears (before payment of Housing Benefit) General needs only</td>
<td>£680,417</td>
<td>£843,778</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current rent arrears (after payment of Housing Benefit) General needs only</td>
<td>£525,345</td>
<td>£562,312</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time to re-let an empty property (only Day to Day repairs lettings) General needs only</td>
<td>16 days</td>
<td>14.8 days</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Rent loss due to empty properties</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>⇔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas safety - %</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs completion: Emergency</td>
<td>99.6%</td>
<td>99.0%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Orbit East Scrutiny Panel reviews our appointments system

The Orbit East Scrutiny Panel is hard at work as always and currently writing a report on their findings regarding appointment systems. The panel chose to look at this area as there were high levels of complaints and compensation paid out and low satisfaction from residents in our ‘Moment of Truth’ surveys.

The Panel did a lot of digging and went into quite a bit of detail learning more about how the process works. They surveyed residents and operatives so that they could get first hand feedback from those delivering and receiving services on the front line. They also interviewed key contractors and took in a presentation from our Regional Repairs Manager, Darren Welham.

They will complete their findings and make their recommendations by the end of the year and we’ll update you with further details in the next edition of Your Orbit.
The latest winners of the Can Do awards have just been announced!

We believe our staff have a real ‘Can do’ attitude and if you think one of them deserves a little extra recognition for going the extra mile for you or your community then nominate them for a ‘Can do’ award!

Adam Dade, Team Leader for Supported Housing and Retirement Living in Orbit East, was awarded a prize after being nominated by two residents for his superb attitude towards customers. They commended him on his dedication to listening to residents and for being a reliable source of support.

The team award went to the Suffolk Home Improvement Agency Admin Team for their excellent service and support to all of their customers and for their recent fundraising exercise to raise money for a local cause. The team are recognised for their commitment to the values and for being friendly and helpful to staff and residents.

Can Do awards are given to staff who go the extra mile to deliver a great level of service to residents and colleagues. The next entry deadline is Friday 31 January.

Three ways to nominate:
- Pick up an entry form from your local reception
- Visit our website
- Call our Customer Service Centre to request a form by post

Undercover

Residents making a difference

Resident ‘mystery shoppers’ completed 208 ‘undercover’ shops for us over the last year across Orbit East and Orbit South. The shoppers were trained to enquire about a variety of services in their local areas and asked to tell us how happy they were with the responses to their calls, emails, letters and office visits.

Here are some of the areas the shoppers tested:
- Repairs requests
- Moving home
- Handy person and gardening services
- Gas servicing
- Payment options
- Welfare Reform guidance
- Rubbish removal
- Kitchen and bathroom replacements
- Shared Ownership and Leasehold services.

We received lots of positive comments, particularly for our Customer Service Centre (CSC) staff, but also some really useful feedback that’s helped us to see where we could do things better.

Here are some of the improvements we’ve made as a result of our shoppers observations:
- Introducing a standard template for email replies sent out by our CSC staff to make sure responses are more personal and easier to understand
- Reminding our staff to put their details on compliments slips when sending out documents so you know who to call if you need to
- Asking our CSC staff to make sure they don’t speak too quickly when answering calls
- Reminding our managers to check that their staff contact details are kept up to date so our CSC staff know who to contact for you
- Making sure our CSC get copies of this magazine before we send it to you so that they’re ready to help if you need more information on anything.

Would you like Your Orbit in a different format or language? Contact us on 0345 600 25 35
The rules to play Sudoku are quite simple. Fill in the blanks so that each row, each column, and each of the nine 3x3 grids contain one instance of each of the numbers 1 through 9.

Value for money

Orbit East and Orbit South staff work hard to find ways to save money in everything we do. From April 2012 to the end of March 2013, we managed to smash our ‘value for money’ target of £100,000, making a combined saving of over £535,000. From getting better prices for energy saving improvements and insulation upgrades to car sharing to meetings, these savings help us to build more homes or provide new services.

Did you know?

Monday mornings are when we get our highest number of calls. Remember, you can contact us anytime by phone. If you have access to the internet, you can sign up for the free ‘Customer secure’ area of our website and access your account details 24/7. Call us and we can help you set it up!