

Together

with
thirteen

Cover story

How a teddy bear helped Eric cycle 10,000 miles in a year

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Investing in your communities

Hints and tips: Fire safety

Your stories: Danny's steps to success



thirteen

Managing and building homes



Welcome from Val

Welcome to the second edition of our customer magazine, which now has a name! Congratulations to Kathryn Jimmison who was the inspiration behind the new name, Together.

The new magazine name means so much to me in so many ways, and at a difficult time like this, togetherness is even more important as we all aim to stay safe, stay at home, and protect our communities.

This situation is like nothing we've ever experienced before and is very serious. Thirteen is following all of the advice from the government and putting all its efforts into how it reduces the spread of coronavirus, keeping customers and colleagues safe and planning for the weeks and months ahead.

This issue of 'Together' has lots of important information in it about how Thirteen is still supporting its customers, just in a different way, as well as some news on recent projects and services and I hope you enjoy the read.

Stay safe everyone.

Val Scollen

Chair of the Customer Engagement Framework

What's inside?	Page
Helping keep everyone safe	3
Get involved!	3
NEW: Tackling anti-social behaviour	4
Your stories: How a teddy bear helped Eric cycle 10,000 miles	5
My Thirteen	6
Your stories: Danny's steps to success	6
STAR performance	7
Spring is in the air - Stockton estates bursting with colour	7
Money advice: here to help	8
Making a clean sweep	9
Investing in your communities	10-11
Fire safety tips	12
Useful contacts for customers	12

****STOP PRESS**STOP PRESS****

Thirteen Academy - apply now!

We're offering customers the chance to apply for a scholarship to cover the cost of their Teesside University course fees, with several available.

Apply online by the extended deadline of Friday 12 June at www.tees.ac.uk/sections/fulltime/scholarships (click on Thirteen Academy)

Note: all of the images used in this magazine were taken prior to the restrictions that were put in place to help reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Please remember to recycle the wrapper this magazine arrived in with your other household plastics.

Helping keep everyone safe

As they are everywhere, things are very different at Thirteen at the moment. We're still working really hard to bring you services, though we're working with fewer staff and are having to do things very differently.

Please be assured that we're taking every precaution we can, providing the right personal protective equipment where it's needed, maintaining social distancing and closely following government guidelines.

You'll see throughout this issue of Together that we have dedicated staff working safely

from home to keep lines of communication open, and to keep providing various services.

While we're having to work very differently at the moment, we still wanted to keep you up-to-date on activities and bring you some positive stories to read, just to help brighten your day while we all work, together, to keep everyone safe.

Thank you to everyone for your patience and understanding at this difficult time.

You can make a difference by getting involved

While we're all staying at home at the moment, did you know that you could be involved in monitoring and improving Thirteen's performance and services? You can do this in lots of ways and for however long, whether that's joining a group or contributing from the comfort of your own home.

Our involved customers help us provide assurance of compliance with the regulatory consumer standards to the leadership team and board and consult on strategy and policy development.

We have a framework to make it happen. It's called BRICKS and it sets out what opportunities there are for customers to get involved:

- **B**uild relationships
- **R**eview services
- **I**nteract with all areas of our business
- **C**onsult with customers and stakeholders
- **K**nowledge gained and shared
- **S**hare findings and recommendations



We're always keen to hear from customers who are interested in helping to shape our services and support our work at a time and in a way that suits them best.

Interested?

Our customer engagement team is still able to take your enquiries while they all work safely from their homes. If you would like to get involved, please email customer.engagement@thirteengroup.co.uk

Tackling anti-social behaviour



We know that anti-social behaviour (ASB) is one issue that can really affect communities, and we take this very seriously. That's why we've listened to feedback from you and from partner agencies and made some important changes to our ASB process.

To make the reporting process as safe and easy as possible for you, we've introduced a new 'triage team' dedicated to dealing with all new reports of ASB.

When you make a report of ASB, a member of this team will contact you within one working day to take the details of your report. They will also complete an assessment with you to make sure you're getting the right support and your case will then be sent on for investigation.

Examples of ASB include:

- Loud noise or music from neighbours
- Youth nuisance
- Missile throwing
- Gang nuisance
- Threats of violence
- Hate/mate crime
- Drug dealing or cultivation
- Harassment or verbal abuse

Examples of what isn't ASB include:

- Everyday household noise
- Babies crying
- Smells from cooking
- Children playing (unless involved in verbal abuse, damage to property or more serious behaviour)

Report it!

There are lots of easy ways to report anti-social behaviour to us in complete confidence:

- ☎ 0300 111 1000
- ✉ asb@thirteengroup.co.uk
- 🌐 www.thirteengroup.co.uk

There are also two apps, for easy reporting:

- The Noise app
- The Reportable app

These are both available to download free of charge from the App Store and Play Store. You will find more information on ASB, plus a handy user guide for each app, on our website. Just go to www.thirteengroup.co.uk and search 'anti-social behaviour'.



Service update

The team is still available to investigate ASB working safely from home. Please keep reporting instances using the methods above, and a member of the triage team will be in touch.



How a teddy bear helped Eric cycle 10,000 miles

More than anything, 73-year-old Eric Suddes loves setting off on his bike from Thirteen's Eden House sheltered scheme in Billingham, where he's been a key part of the community since his wife Marjorie passed away.

"My wife liked teddy bears, so I've got one for each bike. So, I just feel that when I'm out there, Marjorie is out there with me and we're sharing the experiences" said Eric, who began taking cycling seriously at the Hub, the active travel centre in Stockton.

"When I first moved to Eden House I couldn't even ride up Billingham bank - I'd have to get off and push the bike. But that evolved, and then I could ride to the top. It's little goals all the way along."

By 2019 it was a very different story. "I thought I could ride possibly 7,300 miles, which was 100 miles for every year I'd been on this planet. By August I'd ridden that 7,300 so I wondered if I could ride 10,000 miles in the year."

Before Christmas, he'd succeeded, raising much-needed funds for the Great North Air Ambulance along the way.

Bucket list

Eric had taught at secondary school before taking early retirement aged 50 to care for Marjorie, who had developed rheumatoid arthritis in her 20s.

"I ended up as Marjorie's 24-hour carer for about 2½ years. When she died I made a bucket list of things we wanted to do and places we wanted to go. One of them was to go back to the Loire Valley in France because she loved the chateaux. There was this campsite down there that said that it was on a cycle route. So, I bought myself a folding bike and now I've been all over Europe and America."

Life at Eden House

"I'd never been to Billingham before coming to live here, and as it turns out, it's wonderful. We have quite a few things going on here and I help with things like film nights, Sunday lunches, Burn's night suppers. All of the other things I've been involved in have been from being part of this scheme."

Eric is certainly a popular resident of Eden House. Kendra Goddard, housing support co-ordinator for Thirteen, said: "Eric is a fantastic example of some of the amazing people we have in our sheltered schemes. He is a true inspiration with the care and support he shows others, as well as for his cycling."

Have you got an interesting story like Eric's to tell?

Send us your suggestions by emailing communications@thirteengroup.co.uk in the first instance and if yours is chosen, you could win a £50 shopping voucher!

Service update

We're contacting residents in our sheltered schemes regularly through intercoms or mobile phones and customers can still contact us for help and support. We're identifying which residents are more vulnerable, especially if they have to self-isolate or are shielding, and to help protect them we've taken extra measures by stopping unnecessary visits to our supported schemes. Customers that have a personal alarm should still use it as they normally would, and the team will respond.

Everything in one place with

my thirteen



There are some exciting changes happening to the way you can manage your account with us.

These changes have come about as you've told us you want to be able to manage your account in a more user friendly and consistent way and improve your Thirteen experience.

So, we've listened to what you have to say, and building on Touchpoint, we've created a new and exciting digital experience called My Thirteen

where you'll be able to update your details, make a payment, check your account, book a repair and much more.

This Spring, you'll be able to visit My Thirteen at www.mythirteen.co.uk

Keep your eye on our website for more updates as this is the first of many coming your way.

Your stories: Danny's steps to success



Danny Parker is well on the way to a new career in the housing sector thanks to support from our employability service.

Danny was lacking a little in confidence and had no work experience, so joined a Steps to Success course run by Thirteen in 2019. He also attended

one of our apprenticeship awareness sessions and applied for an apprenticeship with us.

His dream turned into reality when he found out he was successful, and he is now a few months into his apprenticeship. He said: "Everyone's been very kind and patient with me and I really appreciate the help and support that I've been given. It certainly helped me get on to the apprenticeship and also helped me feel more confident and comfortable in the job."

Leigh Karakosta, employability tutor at Thirteen, said: "It was great to see Danny's confidence increase over the weeks he spent with us in training, awareness and workshop sessions. His hard work and determination really paid off and I was delighted to see him secure an apprenticeship role with our contact team."

**Service update:
Employability
support**

Thirteen's employability team is still offering training and one-to-one support to help people into jobs. Working safely from home, they are running various sessions online and by phone. For details, email employability@thirteengroup.co.uk or call the team on **01642 947840** and they'll be happy to help you.

STAR performance

Our aim is to put customers at the heart of everything we do and make sure you receive the best service. But how can we tell whether we're continuing to improve?

At the end of 2019 we sent out the STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) questionnaire to customers and the results are in. For the latest STAR survey, around 1,500 contacts were made by telephone, email and web with you.

The results mostly confirm that you believe we're continuing to improve on a performance which is already rated high:

89% say they are happy with the service we provide (2018: 87%)

87% say they are happy with their neighbourhood (2018: 86%)

84% say they are happy with repairs to their home (2018: 82%)

Some results indicate that we're pretty well on par with the previous year:

75% say they are happy we listen to their views and act upon them (2018: 75%)

88% of our customers say they are happy with the quality of their home (2018: 91%)

91% of our customers say their home provides value for money (2018: 92%)

One result that did drop was you saying you're happy that your service charge provides value for money. This fell from 88% in 2018 to 75% this time, so we'll be looking into the reasons why.

We know there is still more we can do, and we look forward to building on these results next year.

Stockton estates bursting with colour

Thousands of flowers are set to brighten up Billingham, Norton, Stockton and Thornaby this spring thanks to the planting of 165,000 crocus bulbs over 820 square metres of land across the four areas.

We commissioned company Lubbe Lisse to carry out the work, which was completed in just one day using a specialist machine.

Fast work - but it took a lot of planning! Thirteen's grounds maintenance supervisor Bryan Moore said: "We worked closely with our neighbourhoods team to identify the locations, including the entrances onto the estates and main bus routes, and then we got to work making the plans.

"The areas will reap the benefits in the spring when the crocuses add a splash of colour. They



will continue to flourish for many years, leaving a lasting impact on the estates."

If you spot any of these cracking crocus displays while you're out for your 'once-a-day' exercise, we do hope they help brighten your day!

Money advice - we're here to help



As most of you are staying at home at the moment, we want to make sure it's as easy as possible for you to pay rent without having to leave the house.

You can still pay:

- online
- by direct debit
- recurring card payment
- by standing order / bank transfer
- by phone, via Allpay on **0844 557 8321** or our contact centre on **0300 111 1000**, both available 24 hours a day.

If these don't suit your current needs, you can check out our list of new payment methods on our website at www.thirteengroup.co.uk/page/paying-rent

New payment solutions include the Allpay app and paying by text message or visiting the Allpay website, www.allpay.net

We know that some of you might be worried about what the coronavirus outbreak means for your income, home and your ability to pay your bills. No-one will lose their home during this unprecedented period, so while government advice is that you should still pay your rent, if you're struggling to pay this or any other bills, please let us know as soon as possible.

Service update

Our money advice team is here to help and has already supported hundreds of customers during this worrying time, while they all work safely from home. If you need their support please email money.advice@thirteengroup.co.uk or call us on **0300 111 1000** (Mon to Fri, 8am – 5pm) and ask for an appointment.

NEW: Introducing Thirteen's energy advice service for customers



Our money advice team can also help with our new energy advice service, supporting you to understand your bills, make sure you're getting the best deal, advise on switching suppliers/tariffs, grants and other financial help available, dealing with fuel debt, the payment methods available, Warm Homes discounts and a check to make sure you are receiving the right benefits.

Four top energy (and money!) saving tips

- 1. Turn off standby appliances** at the plug.
- 2. Turn down your thermostat**
Just turning it down by one degree could save up to £80 a year.
- 3. Wash clothes at a lower temperature**
A wash at 30 degrees rather than 40 degrees can help reduce your energy usage.
- 4. Turning lights off when you leave a room.** A family could save between £50 and £90 a year just by getting into the switch flicking habit.

You'll find more tips on our website. Just pop to www.thirteengroup.co.uk and search 'energy advice'.

If you think you could be spending too much on your bills, or need other energy advice, just give the team a call on **0300 111 1000**, or email money.advice@thirteengroup.co.uk



You said...

your neighbourhoods sometimes need a tidy up

So we...

started our clean sweep initiative

Customers sometimes tell us that the area they live in might not be as spick and span as it could be. This may be something as simple as litter caught in bushes on a green space or as unpleasant as larger items of rubbish that someone has deliberately fly tipped in a back lane.

That's where our 'clean sweep' initiative comes in. We organised the first clean sweep in 2017 and since then they've taken place in communities across the region. And they work - helping to make a positive impact on the neighbourhoods we manage.

The streets are swept, pavements cleared, bushes and hedges are cut back, potential bonfire sites are cleared, and larger items of household waste and other rubbish that's been fly tipped is removed.

"Most clean sweeps last for either a half or a full day, and we like to encourage customers to come along and help," said Michael Hall, senior facilities management manager at Thirteen.

"The initial idea was to improve the cleansing standards for all our estates in Middlesbrough, but now the service can be requested by

neighbourhood co-ordinators to tackle any area in need of a deep clean."

On each of the clean sweep days, neighbourhood co-ordinators work alongside Thirteen's caretaker teams and staff from the local councils, and customers are most welcome too! We're looking forward to bringing more 'clean sweeps' to our neighbourhoods as soon as we can.

Service update: fly tipping

Our grounds maintenance and caretaking teams are still out and about supporting local communities, while working safely and taking all necessary precautions. They're currently focussing on areas blighted by fly tipping. Not only is fly tipping illegal and an eye sore, but it can also be a health hazard and attract pests, so it's especially important that we act at the moment. Before we can clear it away, any fly tipping will be left for 72 hours in case there is a risk of it being contaminated with COVID-19, so please bear with us.

Scott Lowther, director of facilities management at Thirteen said: "We're following government guidelines very closely and doing everything we can to keep our colleagues safe, including providing personal protective equipment, while they work really hard to keep our communities clean and tidy. We urge everyone to help by disposing of rubbish in a safe way."

If you see anyone fly tipping, please report it to us by calling **0300 111 1000** and help us keep our communities safe.

Investing in your communities

In 2019, we announced our five-year plan to invest £1 billion in customers' homes, neighbourhoods and services and in building new affordable homes. Of this, £411m will go to improve to up to 20,000 existing homes, including new roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors and energy efficient boilers, with £5m of it for adaptations to help people stay in their own homes for longer.

Big numbers, but what matters is the lives behind them and the difference they make for customers. Here is a snapshot of some of our most recent projects from the £31m invested in last year alone.

Ragworth, Stockton-on-Tees

"We're really happy. The best part was being able to personalise my home and make my own choices. My home feels so much warmer now, too - it's brilliant."

Customer, Lill Halliday

Originally from Cornwall, Lill moved into her home nine years ago. She is one of 60 customers enjoying the results of improvements to homes in Ragworth, Stockton-on-Tees. The work is now complete and has seen customers receive new kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, windows, doors and roof improvements, since the team began working there.

"It's been a massive team effort" site agent Cliff Laherty said: "They've done a superb job. To call back to see our customers, like Lill, and see what a great experience they've had is very rewarding for the whole team."



Park estate, Thornaby

"These improvements have really benefitted our customers and modernised the appearance of the estate. Many customers have already told us that their homes feel much warmer too."

Project manager, Rubie Lee

An investment project to transform homes on a Thornaby estate is complete. Thirteen's design and delivery team worked in partnership with Esh Living on the £800,000 project.

The work has benefitted over 40 customers with roofing improvements, new windows and doors, canopies and cladding.





“The difference it has made is just brilliant. It’s lovely to feel how much warmer the new windows and doors have made our home.”

Customers Barry and Fiona Gair

“I’ve lived here for many years and take pride in my home. This has made it much more cosy and I know I’ll be happy here for many more years.”

Customer Pat Christon

West Lane, Middlesbrough

Work began in the West Lane area of Middlesbrough in August 2019 to install new UPVC windows, doors and to make roof improvements to the homes of 60 customers as part of a £270,000-plus investment in this part of Middlesbrough.

Site agent Mark Dunn said: “The team has worked tirelessly to put our customers first, and help them feel at ease about the improvements. To hear such positive feedback is fantastic and that’s all down to great teamwork.”

“It’s really improved how the estate looks too.”

Customer Sean McLaughlin

Park End, Middlesbrough

Pat has lived in her Park End home for 45 years. She is one of hundreds of customers living in this part of Middlesbrough to benefit from investment work. Thirteen has been busy fitting hundreds of windows, around 500 boilers, carrying out full rewires and installing kitchens and bathrooms for customers, to improve the standard of their homes.

“I’m very happy with everything the team has done for me. My home feels much warmer and it’s so peaceful and quiet” added Pat.

“It has been fantastic to hear that Pat has had such a great customer experience” said lead operative Mark Dunnakey. “These improvements, which were completed in less than a week, have really modernised Pat’s home and many others, as well as helping improve their energy efficiency.”

Service update: repairs and investment

Our approach to delivering repairs has changed slightly. Routine repairs and inspections are more difficult while we work to keep colleagues and customers safe during the coronavirus outbreak. We’re currently carrying out emergency repairs, gas servicing and a limited number of other repairs and improvement works that we have assessed as being able to undertake safely, while taking all necessary precautions and following Public Health England guidelines.

We’ve currently suspended our approach to investment works, although we are really looking forward to getting back to work on our investment programme as soon as we can, once the current restrictions relax and/or we can work safely. We will bring you more news in future issues of Together.

Fire safety tips



Most of you will be staying at home at the moment during the COVID-19 outbreak, so it's important to stay safe with some simple fire safety steps.

In every home

- Check your smoke alarm is working
- Make sure naked flames - like candles - are never left unattended
- Always ensure cigarettes are properly put out, especially before going to bed
- Don't overload plug sockets
- Turn off electrical equipment and appliances overnight - including heaters, tumble dryers and washing machines
- Make sure everyone in the house knows where the keys are if you need to get out quickly



In low and high-rise buildings

- Make sure you know the evacuation plans for your building
- Keep all fire doors closed
- Make sure all exits are clear of obstructions
- Don't use the lifts in emergency situations - always use the stairs



Useful contacts

Got a query?

Whether it's reporting a repair, money or Universal Credit advice, employability support, or anything else relating to your home:

- ☎ **0300 111 1000 from 8am to 8pm**
- ✉ **customerservices@thirteengroup.co.uk**
- 🌐 **www.thirteengroup.co.uk**

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Domestic abuse support

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, please do still contact the tenancy support team in complete confidence on **0300 111 1000** or by emailing **tenancy.support@thirteengroup.co.uk**

You can also call or text **07464 655582** **24 hours a day, 7 days a week** and someone from the team will respond during working hours. The team are still available, while working safely from home.