

Autumn/Winter 2023

# voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

## In this issue:

- Making homes more energy-efficient
- Tenant Question Time - share your views
- Getting to know our repairs operatives
- Meet our resident inspector
- And more!



watford  
community  
housing

# Meet our resident inspector!

We have a group of resident volunteers who help us ensure that our cleaning and grounds maintenance services are up to scratch and meeting the standards we expect. We spoke to Fred Russell, our longest-standing inspector, to find out more.

As part of our Big Door Knock in June, we asked residents whether they would be interested in helping us to monitor the grounds maintenance and cleanliness of our blocks to help improve their neighbourhoods. We are pleased to say that we have now doubled our number of volunteer resident inspectors!

Fred, our longest-standing resident inspector, told us about the role and why other residents should get involved...

## Tell us about your role as a resident inspector – what’s it all about?

I live at Tree Bridge House and my role as a resident inspector is ensuring cleanliness inside and outside the building by liaising with scheme officers, cleaners and the contractor, Accuro.

Each inspector has information on what to look out for in terms of cleaning and grounds maintenance. Then, as often as we want, we send a report to Watford Community Housing ranking each topic.

For example, if I’m ranking the bin area as zero that means that there is a huge build-up of rubbish and something needs to be done. A three means the area is clear and no action is needed. I am lucky that our scheme officers and cleaners are very thorough and do a marvellous job, but I am there to help if they miss something, or if I spot an issue first.

## You became a resident inspector in 2019 after just three years of living in one of our homes. What drew you to the role?

I had no idea what a resident inspector was when I first moved in, but someone mentioned it and I was immediately interested. I have volunteered all my life, so it just felt right – I was in the police for 40 years, a volunteer for St John Ambulance, British Red Cross, also a volunteer Scout Leader for 40-odd years. I think it’s essential to help out in my block. This is my home and I care about what it looks like – I am proud of where I live.



## What is your favourite thing about volunteering?

Interacting with my neighbours in Tree Bridge House and their families, with my neighbours on the road, and with our scheme officers and cleaners. I just really enjoy talking to them and helping out in any way I can. By building these relationships, my neighbours feel like they can come to me if they can’t get hold of a scheme officer.

## What improvements have you seen as a result of your reports to us?

Recently I got our gate bolt changed – each Wednesday night I had to unbolt the gate in order for the bin workers to get in the next morning, but sometimes other residents would re-bolt it and the rubbish wouldn’t get collected. I reported this and asked for the Fire Brigade lock so the bin workers could open it themselves, and Watford Community Housing happily sorted that out for us. It’s a small improvement but it takes the pressure off me and other residents.

## How is the support from Watford Community Housing?

The support from Watford Community Housing is absolutely brilliant – after five years I can’t fault it at all! I work with staff here, from the Communities, Housing and Customer Relations teams, and they are all lovely. It always feels like a two-way relationship, like they always want to help, rather than me just reporting to them all the time.

## What would you say to anyone who may be thinking of volunteering with us?

Do it! There is so much you can do if you push yourself and get involved. More volunteers are always needed so if you’re interested, go for it!

**We are always on the lookout for more volunteers to help us keep our neighbourhoods as clean as possible. If you would like to join us, or would like any more information, please email [customerrelationsteam@wcht.org.uk](mailto:customerrelationsteam@wcht.org.uk).**

# Helping customers save money

Our insulation works programme continues to improve the energy efficiency of customers' homes.

**We have been working hard to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and help save our tenants money on their energy bills through insulation work.**

Through our Greener Herts partnership with B3Living, settle and Dacorum Borough Council, we have secured £14m in government funding for energy efficiency improvements to homes in Hertfordshire. Combined with a further pledge of £25m from the four organisations, this means works will be carried out on around 1,500 homes over two years from April 2023!

We are working with contractors SCIS and KOOKA on 285 homes, doing a variety of works including external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, internal wall insulation, and replacing windows.

As of October 2023, we have completed 38 properties, and are looking to complete 101 by January.

Here is what two of our residents had to say about the improvement works to their home:

Gordon – "I'm pleased with it and very happy with the colour – looking forward to it saving me money on my gas bill."

Joe – "It is absolutely wonderful what they have done, the house looks really modern! All minor hiccups have been resolved so quickly and all the staff have been very friendly and helpful. We have hardly had to put the heating on at all which will make a very big difference to our heating bill!"



## Giving balconies a boost

*You said, we did!*

You told us that the balconies for the flats in Foxhill were in bad state. The safety and security of our tenants is our top priority, so we got to work replacing them.

As well as installing new balconies, we made a number of other improvements. We stripped them back, removing the old timber frames and replaced them with a new hard-wearing surface and structure, a better drainage system, fire-rated cladding and insulation.

We've made great progress on the Foxhill balconies and will move onto Brush Rise when they are all complete!



## Put us in the picture!

Did you know that you can send us photos along with your answers when you complete our feedback surveys? If you aren't happy with a service we have provided, you can attach a photo and help us see exactly what needs improving.

For example, a resident recently sent us a picture of cobwebs high on the ceiling that our cleaners had missed, so we bought long range dusters to ensure our cleaners were better equipped.

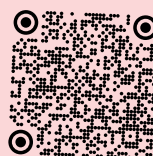
## Cracking down on fly-tipping

In September 2022 we partnered with the Environmental Crime unit at Watford Borough Council to reduce the amount of fly-tipping at our high-rise blocks, Abbey View and Munden View. The group meet monthly to discuss fly-tipping cases and what we can do to keep the area cleaner.

We let residents know that we would now be using CCTV to identify anyone dumping rubbish and issuing on-the-spot fines, and we're pleased to have seen a drastic change in the amount of fly-tipping around the bin stores. As of October 2023, we have identified 24 fly-tippers. 11 of these have been served fixed penalty notices and paid a fine.

We are already seeing a difference to the cleanliness of this area, and we are looking into further ways to ensure it stays this way.

Scan the QR code for information on how we deal with fly-tipping:



## Dealing with damp and mould



Problems with condensation, mould and damp can occur during the winter.

One easy way to reduce the risk of condensation is to turn on your heating. Warm air holds more moisture than cool air, so it is less likely to cause droplets of water around your home. Keeping your home at a controlled, warm temperature will help reduce condensation.

We are committed to tackling any issues quickly and effectively, so if you have damp or mould in your home, please contact us straight away.

Find out more by visiting our website at [wcht.org.uk/mould](http://wcht.org.uk/mould)

## Supporting you with repairs

We know that there is always an increase in the number of repairs that are requested at this time of year. We are here to take care of any larger repairs for you – please bear in mind that it may just take us a little longer during the winter, as we have more jobs to deal with.

In some situations, it can take up to five days to complete repairs to heating and hot water systems, so please report any problems as quickly as possible so that we can get to work on them.

The fastest way to report an issue is through your online account on our website. You can also call us on 0800 218 2247 or email us at [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk).

# Getting to know our repairs operatives

We're proud of our in-house repairs team, who carry out vital jobs for residents. We caught up with three of our operatives to find out more about them.



L-R: Klaudia, Jess and Shanice

Our repairs team are dedicated to keeping your home in working order. We met up with Shanice, a multi-skilled operative who specialises in plumbing, trainee electrician Jess, and Klaudia, a multi-skilled operative with expertise in heating and gas work.

### What was your journey into getting this role?

**Shanice** – “I’ve always wanted to get into plumbing but when you’re young and female you get labelled as a tomboy and pushed towards things like hairdressing and beauty. It wasn’t until I got a bit older that I decided to do what I’d dreamed of doing. I did two years in college then two years as an apprentice, then the person I did my apprenticeship with brought me to Watford Community Housing, where I’ve been ever since.”

**Jess** – “I’ve wanted to be an electrician since I was in secondary school as my grandad was one. I went to check out a college and they turned me down – also saying to do hair and beauty instead. I ended up doing a variety of jobs but then

Covid-19 hit, and I thought ‘life is too short, let’s study to be an electrician’. I want to eventually start my own business with my friend who is a gas engineer.”

**Klaudia** – “My husband was a gas engineer and I worked in the office of a gas company so was always interested in the trade. It wasn’t until my boiler broke down and two girls from a company called ‘Girls on Gas’ came to fix it that I seriously considered it. They told me it was a great job if you are working around having kids and they inspired me to give it a go – the following month I started my courses.”

### What’s a typical day like?

**Shanice** – “It varies day to day! You can have five jobs planned in a day but if an emergency comes in then that takes priority. That’s what I enjoy about the plumbing – you can do five of the same jobs, but they can all be so different, some can take 10 minutes and some two hours. Some are an easy fix and sometimes you have to do a lot of problem-solving to find out where a leak is coming from!”

**Jess** – “It really varies! With empty properties we have to do an Electrical Installation Condition Report before a new tenant moves in, which can take from four hours to a whole day if there is a fault. Then, like Shanice, it is a bit of a mystery, and it can take a lot of problem-solving to find the fault.”

**Klaudia** – “I do gas safety checks which need to be done on a property every year, checking for gas leaks, breaks and repairs.”

**What is your favourite part of the job?**

**Shanice** – “In the nicest way possible, I love proving people wrong. I have had tenants who have said ‘I’ve had five plumbers try this and no-one can do it, why do you think you could do it?’ – and then I fix it. As females we do get doubted a lot, so when we can prove we are just as good as the men, it is satisfying.”

**Jess** – “For me it’s upgrading things – for example the old consumer units are like spaghetti junction, so it’s nice to be able to upgrade it to something neat and tidy and easier for the next tenants. It is nice ripping out old stock and putting in something shiny and new.”

**Klaudia** – “I love being out and about, and being active. That is what is great about any labouring jobs, you are always on the move.”

**Do you feel supported by Watford Community Housing?**

**Jess** – “I do! We have had customers send positive feedback directly to the chief executive which has come back to us, which was really nice. You don’t always hear about the positives, so it is nice when you are recognised.”

**Do you like being in a customer-facing role and meeting tenants?**

**Shanice** – “Plumbing is a customer-facing role, and I really enjoy working with and for people. We are providing a service that is genuinely wanted and needed and are helping someone in a potentially bad situation, so you do go home thinking you have done something good.”

**What would you say to others who are thinking of getting into a trade?**

**Klaudia** – “Go for it and don’t stop.”



**Who is responsible for my repair?**

We know how frustrating it is when things break. Our operatives are on hand to carry out vital repairs to keep your home fit for day-to-day living when something goes wrong. However, some repairs will be your responsibility, and it may depend on the type of tenancy you have.

There is now a dedicated page on our website so you can find out which repairs are covered by our service. To check whether we will carry out your repair, scan the QR code here:



**Want to know how long your repair will take?**



Why not check out our website for our current average repairs wait times! Our repairs page is routinely updated with the latest information about how long you may have to wait for a specific service.

Scan the QR code to see the latest times.

Visit [wcht.org.uk/repairs](http://wcht.org.uk/repairs) for more information on our service.

# Let's hear from our partners

We work closely with the police and fire service, as well as other partners, to keep all of our customers safe and secure in their homes and communities.

We're committed to helping build safe and friendly communities. This means that we will work with partners to address incidents quickly and effectively, and to ensure that you can feel safe in and around your home.

A large part of keeping you safe involves us working closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue. We spoke to Andy Wiseman and Robin Clark to get an overview of these services and how they can support you.

**Andy Wiseman, Chief Inspector for the Watford Community Safety Partnership:**

I'm grateful to Watford Community Housing for inviting me to contribute to this edition of **Voice**. I took on the role of Chief Inspector for the Watford Community Safety Partnership at the start of the year and I am immensely proud to hold this position.

I thought it would be beneficial to provide an overview of policing in Watford:

- Having served the town well for 83 years, the existing police station on Shady Lane has come to the end of its life and we are set to move to a new police station, at 3 George Street in the town centre, in November 2023.
- The area is served by five '999 response' teams (known as 'Intervention' teams), which provide assistance 24/7, 365 days of the year. We also have a proactive 'Operation Scorpion' unit, which develops intelligence information, targets key offenders and patrols crime hotspots.
- Overall, in Watford there are roughly 150 police officers, police staff and volunteers including Special Constables. Hertfordshire Constabulary currently has 2,300 police officers, the most we've ever had!



- As of September 2023 reported crime in Watford is slightly down compared to this time last year and our detection rate is up. I am committed to maintaining these trends.

Since arriving in Watford one of my immediate priorities has been the prevention and detection of street robberies. In recent months we have deployed targeted patrols and I am pleased to report that this has led directly to the arrest of several suspected robbers and a drop in the number of robberies since.

Similarly, I have been keen to tackle thefts from/of motor vehicles. We are using crime data on a daily basis to target our resources and again, have made progress in recent weeks both in terms of arresting suspected offenders and potentially preventing thefts by educating local residents to keep vehicles locked when parked overnight.

I am also committed to tackling violence against women and girls, not least in terms of the town's night-time economy. We are currently in the process of changing the way we deploy officers in order to maximise opportunities to identify predatory behaviour early on, with the aim of preventing offences from occurring.

I am keen to instil a 'back to basics' model of policing – the public want to see their police out on patrol, to know who their local

officers are and to receive a good service in the event that they call for our assistance. I believe that this is all achievable.

Of course, our work would be much harder were it not for the support and information we receive from the communities we police and the partner agencies also serving Watford. My officers and I really want to hear from our communities.

**There are lots of ways to get in touch:**

- Call 999 in an emergency, 101 for general enquiries and non-emergency reports
- Visit [www.herts.police.uk](http://www.herts.police.uk) for information about the constabulary, including local officer details and to report a non-emergency crime, incidents or anti-social behaviour online
- Email the Safer Neighbourhood Team for Watford at [Watford@herts.police.uk](mailto:Watford@herts.police.uk)
- Visit [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org) or ring 0800 555 111 to give information anonymously
- Visit [capture.rantandrive.com/s3/WatCentral](http://capture.rantandrive.com/s3/WatCentral) to give us feedback
- Follow us on Facebook (Watford Police) or X, previously known as Twitter (@WatfordPolice)
- Visit [www.owl.co.uk](http://www.owl.co.uk) to sign up to our online Neighbourhood Watch scheme



**Prevention First**



**Hertfordshire**  
Fire and Rescue Service

**Robin Clark, Fire Safety Inspector:**

I am Robin Clark, the Fire Safety Inspector employed by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue (HFRS) in the Fire Protection Department. As a department we cover the whole county, but we are split into six teams and cover specific areas. I am the Lead Officer for Watford and Three Rivers and currently I have three officers attached to my team.

I joined the service in 2018 and at that time had no background of working in fire safety. It has been a steep learning curve, especially post-Grenfell. Hopefully the lessons learned from that event will make for a safer environment in the future as the building industry and enforcing authorities take heed of the mistakes that led to that event.

We work closely with Watford Community Housing to keep residents safe. The communal areas of flats – such as the corridors, staircases, individual flat doors, corridor fire doors and the outside walls and balconies – fall under our remit, so we carry out fire safety inspections.

We also work together to identify fire issues in a block. For example, there was recently an electrical scooter fire in a storage area of a block of flats. The fire burnt itself out before HFRS attended but it identified the issue and worked with Watford Community Housing to educate the residents of the possible dangers of charging electrical devices. If we see items left in communal areas that are a fire hazard during our fire inspections we alert Watford Community Housing, who get it removed as quickly as possible.

HFRS has several areas of work other than firefighting – we have community



engagement teams who do things such as the home ‘safe and well’ visits, and youth engagement schemes who work with partner agencies such as the police or housing associations like Watford Community Housing.

We are also involved in Safety Advisory Groups (SAG) where we work closely with the police, ambulance service, licensing authorities, highways local authorities, and event promoters to make sure events are as safe as they can be.

My one piece of advice would be to be aware of where you buy your electrical items from – ask yourself why they are so cheap, especially when buying online. They tend to be cheap because the manufacturer has saved money by not including all the safety features.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch:

- If it's an emergency, please call 999.
- Visit [hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://hertfordshire.gov.uk) and choose 'fire and rescue'
- You can find us on X (@HFRS), and on Facebook (Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service)



- If there is a major incident in your area, the control room will update our social media with up-to-date information, such as road closures or informing residents to shut windows due to the smoke etc.

- If you would like to arrange a 'safe and well' visit to your home, you can phone your local fire station to arrange an appointment or visit our website.

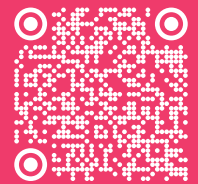
## Feel independent in your home

Herts Careline is a community alarm service that was set up for our Independent Living residents to provide peace of mind. However, our Gateway Membership Team is keen to make sure you know that it is something you can set up for yourself or your family.

Herts Careline can provide you with a community alarm – this gives you the reassurance that if you have a fall or become unwell, you will always be able to contact someone for help.

The community alarm, which you can wear around your neck, on your belt or on a wrist strap, has an emergency alarm which when pressed will call one of Careline's friendly operators – they will answer 24/7. They can then contact a family member or friend to reassure you or call the emergency services if required.

If you're interested in finding out more visit [care-line.co.uk](http://care-line.co.uk) or scan the QR code.



## Stay on top of your finances with Quids In!

For this edition of Voice, we have partnered with 'Quids in' magazine to send you a copy of their Autumn magazine.

Your representatives in the Gateway Membership Team asked us to include this magazine, which is full of information about energy bills, cost of living winter payments, getting back into work, and much more. We hope you find it useful!

# Do you know how to raise a complaint with us?

We've improved the way we deal with customers' complaints and we want to make sure that you know how to raise any issues you may have with us.



Over the past year we have been working hard to improve our complaint-handling process. The number of active cases has gone down, and we have seen an increase in customer satisfaction with how we handle complaints.

But there is still work to be done – use our three-step process below to raise a complaint and help us improve our services:

1. **Report it to us** – we cannot resolve issues that we don't know about. The quickest way to contact us is by using your online account, but you can also call us on 0800 218 2247 or email [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk).
2. **Raise a complaint** – if you reported the issue to us but you weren't happy with the service

provided then you can raise this as a complaint. There are multiple ways you can do this: you can report feedback through your online account, you can send it to [feedback@wcht.org.uk](mailto:feedback@wcht.org.uk) or you can fill out the form on our website at [wcht.org.uk/contact](http://wcht.org.uk/contact).

3. **Escalate to the Housing Ombudsman** – if you have completed the first two steps and are not happy with our final response to your complaint, you can then escalate it to the Housing Ombudsman. Visit their website at [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint), call 0300 111 3000 or email [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

## Thistley House courtyard improved for residents

You said, we did!

Back in June, we headed out into our local communities for the Big Door Knock, to listen to residents' thoughts about their homes and services. As a result of one of these conversations, we are pleased to have completed works to install brand new railings at Thistley House to make the courtyard safer and more enjoyable for residents!

We received feedback during the Big Door Knock that residents felt the area was unsafe for children to play in, as there was only a wooden barrier separating the car park from the paved area closer to the building.

Resident safety is one of our top priorities at Watford Community Housing



and the new railings we've fitted will now help our tenants feel more secure when using the public courtyard. The railings help separate the courtyard from the car park and have created a safe place for children to play.

### The Big Door Knock 2023 – the stats

We held our third annual Big Door Knock on Thursday 15 June. Here are the highlights from the day:

- We knocked on 4,366 doors (about 300 more than last year).
- We talked to 1,261 tenants (about 200 more than last year).
- We got a 77% overall satisfaction rating, with satisfaction highest in our Housing for Older People (90%).
- The average rating from customers this year increased from 3.89 to 4.07.
- 80% of customers told us that they know how to make a complaint if they need to.
- 29% of customers were interested in finding out more about community activities.
- 24% were interested in finding out about other housing options.
- We helped 20 residents sign up for an online account.



# Making Abbots Langley greener!

Our staff went out into the community to help tidy customers' gardens, plant new greenery and make the area more pleasant for local people.

On Thursday 14 September our staff were out in Abbots Langley carrying out activities to make the neighbourhood tidier and to promote biodiversity.

We had teams tidying up communal areas and customers' gardens, building bird boxes and making up wildflower seed packs for our residents to collect at Abbots Autumn Fest, and another team going door-to-door letting our tenants know all about the great work we do around biodiversity.

We had teams working on eight gardens across Abbots Langley – here is what one of our residents had to say: "It's challenging maintaining my garden on my own. I work full-time with three young children, so I really appreciate the help. After this I'm looking forward to getting on top of it and being able to manage it myself!"

The following Saturday our Community team headed to Abbots Autumn Fest, where we gave away around 130 bird boxes and lots of wildflower seeds and bulbs. As proud sponsors of the event, it was lovely to see so many of our tenants and chat to them about how they plan to improve the

biodiversity in their own gardens.

Thanks to our wonderful partners who made it a success! Travis Perkins donated tools and bird boxes, Accuro supplied us with plants and helped with the gardens, and the bulk of the sponsorship was provided by our insulation provider SCIS. The event also had support from our partners at Hertfordshire County Council and Three Rivers District Council.

Helen Town, our Group Director of Property and Partnerships said, "As a community gateway housing organisation, it is so important to us to support thriving local communities and we are proud to have been able to put on an event that focused on improving biodiversity.

"By giving Abbots Langley residents bird boxes and wildflower seeds it allows them to create their own flourishing habitats for wildlife and take control of the biodiversity in their own gardens.

"Together with our partners, we made a massive difference for the local community in just a few short hours."



## We're happy to translate

We know that our tenants have a range of different communication needs and we will always try to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible, taking into account individual needs.

Other than English, our tenants speak over 30 languages with the top five being Urdu, Polish, Arabic, Punjabi and Italian.

Here are some of the translation services we provide:

- If you call or visit us in person and need a translator to help you, we will use a service called Language Line that connects us to a trained translator that can speak the language required. There are also staff members that may be able to act as informal translators if necessary. We can provide BSL or Makaton interpreters and braille resources on request.
- We know that many tenants rely on their family or members of their community to give them support with translation services. Please know that we can provide independent support for you, especially if the matter is sensitive, such as relating to domestic abuse or money worries.
- Our website features a 'select language' tool which can translate each page both verbally and in writing. You can select this feature and translate our website into over 100 different languages!

We want to make sure we communicate with you in the way that best suits you – if you haven't told us your language preference, get in touch or update your details on your online account.

## Want to learn a new skill?

We know that finding the time and money to learn a new skill can be tricky, especially at the moment. That is why we have fully funded 10 places on each of the online courses below!

These courses cover a variety of useful skills and subjects for both professional and personal use. They are run by High Speed Training and are fully accredited courses.

The courses we are offering are:

**Paediatric First Aid** – to help those who live or work with children to learn the basic first aid skills needed to react in an emergency situation

**Workplace First Aid** – to give you the confidence to respond effectively to a variety of emergency situations that might occur in the workplace

**COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) Training** – explains how to prevent and monitor exposure to harmful substances and how to minimise risk

**GDPR Training** – this teaches you what your responsibilities are how you can help keep data secure

**Customer Service Training** – you will learn how to communicate effectively, how to handle common issues and how to work within company rules

We also have a few spaces left on the Level 2 Food Hygiene and safety for catering. This course will teach you best practices when dealing with food, how to keep people safe and how to work within food safety laws.

Places on each of the courses are very limited, so book now if you are interested! To book your free place, get in touch with our Community team by emailing [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk).

# GMT Chair named in Watford's top 100!

We are proud that Chris Blackett, Chair of our Gateway Membership Team, was selected as one the '100 people who made Watford'.



2022 marked 100 years since Watford was awarded its borough status. To celebrate, Watford Borough Council asked for nominations for people – past or present – who have actively contributed to the town. These nominations were then presented to a community panel and 100 were chosen.

We proudly nominated Chris Blackett, Chair of our Gateway Membership Team (GMT), due to her long-lasting passion for social housing and the incredible works she does to give our tenants a voice – and we are very pleased to announce that she was chosen!

We asked Chris how she felt about making the list. She said: “I feel honoured to be nominated by Watford Community Housing and to be chosen for Watford’s Top 100. It was a huge surprise! I got involved in social housing because I believe everybody deserves a decent home to live in. Not everyone can afford to buy their home or pay high private rents so there must be places for them to live. I have lived happily in social housing most of my life and will continue to fight for others to have that

chance as well.

“I have lived in Watford since I was five and have seen so many changes. I remember Caters, Fine Fare, Bejam, Cawdells and the Blue Cross Sale at Clements – all have gone now. I remember the day Watford went to Wembley for the FA Cup Final with Graham Taylor. Watford is a vibrant town with lots going on – I like living here and look forward to seeing what happens next.

“When I became an involved tenant it was because I wanted a say in what was happening to the council housing – I wanted to make sure my voice was heard. Now I want to ensure all tenants have a voice when it comes to decision-making around their homes and communities. This is why the GMT is so important. We all have our reasons for joining but we all have the same aim; to make our homes and communities the best they can be. We rely on other tenants to come and join and bring fresh ideas and share our commitment. Together our shared voice can make sure social housing is not forgotten because so many people will always need it.”

# Working to represent you

Our Gateway Membership Team went to the Tenants Participation Advisory Service conference to learn how they can represent you as effectively as possible.

On Wednesday 12 July, our Community Team accompanied five members of our Gateway Membership Team (GMT) to the two-day annual Tpas Conference in Coventry.

The conference involved up-to-the-minute policy analysis, constructive debates and challenges, practical skills and knowledge, and a space to discuss all this with other tenants and housing staff from across the country.

It's for anyone who takes an active role with their landlord or in their wider community, so it was perfect for our GMT – a group of tenants who represent other tenants. We invited the GMT along as it gives them the opportunity to develop their skills in supporting their fellow tenants.

This is what a few members of the GMT thought about the conference:

**Chris – Chair of the GMT:** “One of the keynote speakers was Richard Blackway from the Housing Ombudsman, who talked about the new business plan for the Ombudsman service, complaint-handling, and the severe maladministration findings against landlords in the past year and how

they reached their conclusions.

“Another was Kate Dodsworth, from the Regulator for Social Housing, who spoke about the increase in consumer regulation and the challenges for landlords getting ready for them.

“I attended an excellent workshop by Rebecca Bryant from Resolve about their anti-social behaviour (ASB) action plan and how to implement it. Hopefully she will be able to come and talk to the GMT and perhaps some of our tenants on ASB.

“We all found the workshops very informative, but the most important part of the conference was networking. We met tenants from Cornwall to Newcastle, some old friends and some new and were able to learn from them and bring some best practice ideas back.

“This is a very important event on

the GMT calendar. Although they are two long, tiring days I know we all enjoyed it and it was very worthwhile.”

**Lily:** “The sheer volume of knowledge all under one roof was astounding. The other big bonus was that everyone there was willing to share that knowledge. The next task is to break down all that was learnt and put in to practice.”

**Simanga:** “It sure was a wonderful and inspiring conference – I got something out of all of the sessions I attended.”



## Meet the newest members of the GMT!

### Sarah Compton

“Hello, I'm Sarah Compton and I have been a Watford Community Housing tenant for five years. I joined the GMT because moving into social housing has completely changed my life for the better. I am passionate about helping people and want to make a positive difference to the community and improve things for other tenants. As a disabled person/wheelchair user, I hope to see things from a different perspective.”



### Hind El Khoumssi

“My name is Hind, and I joined Watford Community Housing as a tenant in 2016. Prior to the pandemic I was offered a Level 2 Housing Practice course that was funded by Watford Community Housing and part of their community engagement programme. Since then I have taken part in scrutiny panels, become a Customer Representative and most recently a GMT member. This has empowered me with so much knowledge about the housing sector and its challenges, so that now I can be a voice for the wider social housing community”

**The latest news from the Gateway Membership Team – which represents you!**

## Get involved with our Tenant Question Times!

Did you know that one of the best ways for our tenants to get involved and influence change is through our Tenant Question Times (TQTs)?

TQTs are the perfect way for tenants to engage with us, better understand why certain decisions are made and help make improvements. Over the last year we have hosted several TQTs including sessions on downsizing, our estate services, and lastly a TQT for our Leadership Team to answer questions before our annual general meeting.

Due to the success of these sessions we will be hosting a lot more next year. To make sure as many people can attend as possible, we will let you know the dates far in advance, will ensure they can be attended both virtually and in person, and will allow you to send us all your questions in advance.

Our next TQT will be on Tuesday 13 February 2024 – make sure to add this to your diary! We will give you further details nearer the time.

### Our Shared Ownership and Leaseholder sessions

We understand that being a shared ownership customer or a leaseholder means that you have a different relationship with us as a landlord.

To ensure that we are listening to the needs of all our customers, we held two sessions on 9 and 10 October to discuss upcoming major works, service charges and defect management, and to answer any questions customers had about the services we provide.

We understand that we haven't always got things right – we hope that these sessions showed that we have heard your concerns and will continue to listen and improve.

Here are some of the outcomes of the session:

- We are pleased to say that we have already taken action based on issues raised at the session – it was brought to our attention that the communal door at Spur Close was broken, so we got this fixed and sent out a communication to all residents to let them know.
- To make sure we keep improving, we need to hear

from you. If you haven't already, you will shortly be receiving a survey on CX Feedback asking for your help to craft our services going forward.

- Due to the positive feedback that we have received, we will also be hosting more of these sessions next year!
- To keep you in the loop, we have created a webpage that will be the home for all information and updates for shared ownership and leaseholder customers – visit the page by scanning the QR code.



## Talk to us if you have money worries

We understand that living costs are still very high and that some of our tenants may be struggling.

We have a brilliant team of staff here who want to support you in a way that works for you. Whether you're looking for practical support, advice on managing your bills or ensuring you are receiving the right benefits, our Financial Inclusion Officers are here for you.

Talk to us today to start feeling better about your finances.

Visit [wcht.org.uk/moneyadvice](http://wcht.org.uk/moneyadvice) or scan the QR code to find out more about how we can help.

