

Spring 2024

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing



- Consulting customers on repairs timescales
- Welcoming new tenants from West Herts Homes
- How to get help with anti-social behaviour
- Listening to your feedback
- And more!



watford
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housing

Representing tenants' views in Awaab's Law consultation

We have worked with residents to respond to the government's consultation on a proposed new law, which will enforce strict timescales for housing providers to deal with unsafe homes.

In December 2020, two-year-old Awaab Ishak died as a result of direct exposure to mould in his home in Rochdale.

Awaab's Law is being introduced to ensure landlords investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes. The government ran a consultation on the proposed timeframes between January and March this year.

The government wanted to hear views on its proposal, which will require social landlords to investigate hazards within 14 days, start necessary repairs within an additional 7 days and carry out emergency repairs within 24 hours.

We worked with our Gateway Membership Team and our Customer Experience Committee to put together our response as an organisation. We take damp and mould very seriously and are supportive of the efforts to improve the repairs service for tenants across the UK.



Working with you to eradicate damp and mould

At our in-depth damp and mould scrutiny session last year, we received lots of great feedback from residents about how we can improve our service. Here are a few of the changes we have made:

- The whole process has been streamlined to ensure no damp and mould cases get overlooked.
- Damp and mould training has now been given to all customer services staff to ensure we provide the best possible service.
- Tenants who report an issue are offered a specialist pack, including a mould wash, to help them eradicate the problem. If you are unable to collect the pack from us, we are happy to deliver it to your home.

We are committed to tackling condensation, mould, damp and disrepair issues quickly and effectively, so if you have any of

these in your home you should contact us straight away.

You can get in touch by emailing enquiries@wcht.org.uk or calling us on 0800 218 2247.



Using your feedback to improve the services we offer

Customers have been helping to improve our services by sharing their views at our Tenant Question Time events. These are just some of the changes we've made based on your comments.

Our Tenant Question Time (TQT) sessions are the best way for you to engage with us and help make improvements. In response to your feedback, we have made some changes to help more customers get involved and find out about the events.

To remain as transparent as possible, we'll now be uploading action trackers to our website in the weeks following the sessions. This means that if you missed a TQT, shared owner or leaseholder session, you'll be able to see the main topics that were discussed and the improvements we aim to make.

Some residents said that they didn't know when the sessions were, so you can now see the dates for all the meetings over the next year on our website and plan your attendance far in advance!

Some customers have told us that they aren't confident joining our sessions online. You can attend our TQTs and scrutiny sessions either in person or online, giving as many people as possible the option of attending. We will also try our best to accommodate any transport or childcare costs, or other accessibility needs.



For the dates of our Tenant Question Time and scrutiny sessions over the next year, scan this QR code.

For the dates of our upcoming sessions for leaseholders and shared ownership customers, scan the QR code here:



Our upcoming TQT events

3 July - 6.30pm to 8pm

9 September - 6.30pm to 8pm

22 January 2025 - 6.30pm to 8pm

Get in touch by emailing community@wcht.org.uk if you'd like to attend any of these sessions.



Working to improve Abbey View and Munden View

We are upgrading the communal heating system at Abbey View and Munden View - our two high-rise buildings on the Meriden. We will also carry out a programme of ventilation, roofing, glazing and insulation works, making homes warmer and cheaper to run, and saving residents money on their energy bills!

Scan the QR code to read the latest updates!



Keeping clean with Accuro

We are very pleased to announce that we will be keeping Accuro on as our cleaning and grounds maintenance contractor for the next few years!

In April 2023 we put out a survey and held a TQT session to find out what our residents expect from our grounds maintenance and cleaning providers and how we can improve. After creating a new specification based on your feedback, we went out for tender and, with the help of the Gateway Membership Team (GMT), we reappointed Accuro as they scored the best on both quality and cost.



Keeping you updated on our repair times

Did you know you can check our repairs response times on our website? Go to wcht.org.uk/repairs for up-to-date repair times on all our services.

Although our response times can sometimes vary depending on weather conditions and the availability of materials, we will always try to complete your repair as soon as possible.



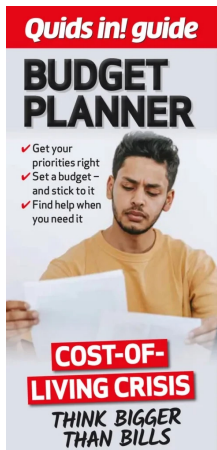
Scan the QR code for more information.

Budgeting made easy - with Quids In!

We've partnered with 'Quids In' magazine to send you a handy Budget Planner - which opens up into a wallchart - with this issue of Voice.

The planner aims to help you to prepare a simple budget and gives you an easy and engaging way to manage your finances.

We hope you find it useful!



Tenant spotlight – Tony Lankester

We hear from resident Tony Lankester, who has written a book all about holistic wellness – and is raising money for charity too!

Tony, one of our Independent Living residents, was officially diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 54. Having finally got a diagnosis, he felt an overwhelming drive to beat the condition and take back control of his life.

Tony has written a book that captures his journey to understanding his own body, mind and spirit, and gives 'how to' tips that readers can apply to their own wellness journey. Here is what Tony had to say:

“After having episodes as a teenager and not knowing what was causing them, getting diagnosed at 54 was like a revelation – I could finally put a handle on this monster that would reappear every so often.

“I went on a journey to learn everything I could about this term called ‘holistic wellness’ which is how the mind, body and spirit interlink and should work in harmony. Since mastering it, I haven’t had a bipolar episode in 11 years.

“I felt like I wanted to give something back so decided to turn my experience into a book. Over the years, I created seven volumes of journals that documented how I was getting better, as well as all my research which formed the basis of my book.

“I wanted it to be bite-sized chunks, so it was easy to pick up and put down and as easily digestible as possible. There are about 1,100 bullet points in the book so people can pick and choose which points work for you in terms of taking control of your wellness.

“I’ve been on a steep learning curve over the last few years, collecting information and making it accessible for as many people as possible across the world. It’s great fun – there is so much to



learn about! I am looking into making a hardback version of the book, an audiobook that I can make myself using AI, YouTube channels for longer form content, using social media for marketing, and making books targeted to specific groups like PTSD in war veterans, over-50s and families living on a budget. I have a big masterplan – it’s very exciting!

“As my way of giving back, I am very proud to be giving 50% of the proceeds from the book to charity. The money will be going towards pre- and post-natal care for mothers and babies in third world countries.”

Tony’s book – *Mastering Holistic Wellness: a practical guide for every day* – is available on Amazon and through Kindle unlimited.

To buy Tony’s easy-to-read, empowering guide, scan the QR code here.



Welcome to our new tenants!

After consultation with its residents, West Herts Homes has transferred its homes to Watford Community Housing.



We are delighted to welcome 42 new tenants to Watford Community Housing!

West Herts Homes decided that merging with a larger housing association would ensure that their residents continued to receive excellent services.

We have the resources in place to continue to provide good-quality services

for our new residents including our dedicated Customer Services team and support with money worries.

Read more about the transfer on our website by scanning the QR code.



More support for tenants struggling with living costs

As a community gateway housing association, our main purpose is to provide affordable homes and support for people with lower incomes. We also own some garages which are available for rent, and this year we are making a change so that more of the money we receive for these garages goes to those who need it most.

All profits from this year’s increase in garage rent will be going into our Welfare Fund – a critical service we created to support tenants with the cost of living. This change has been championed by our Gateway Membership Team to secure more money for the Welfare Fund, which helped 75 residents in 2023.

80% of our garages are rented by private individuals rather than Watford Community Housing tenants – and we estimate that the extra £1.50 a week in rent from each of our garages will mean £70,000 more goes to our Welfare Fund.



Delivering great Independent Living services

We pride ourselves in delivering accessible, affordable and inclusive services to our Independent Living and flexicare residents.

The hard work of our teams was recently recognised by erosh, a national consortium that advocate to improve living standards for older people. As a result, they have awarded us the Independent Living Standards accreditation.

Scan the QR code to read more about what this means for residents.



Introducing our new Independent Living Action Group

The Independent Living Action Group is a newly invigorated group of tenants from our Independent Living and flexicare schemes.

The members come together to discuss issues in their blocks, policies, and events they can put on in their scheme lounges. They then feed information back to all the other residents.

As part of our gateway model, this group has a direct channel to the Gateway Membership Team and our Communities team, so we can assist with any support, training or funding they need.

The group were highly praised during our recent assessment by erosh, who saw it as a great way to decrease social isolation in our older tenants.

Do you know how to raise a complaint?

If you have a concern about the service you receive from us, we want to put things right. Here's what you need to do:

1 Firstly, report the issue to us – use your online account at wcht.org.uk, call 0800 218 2247 or email enquiries@wcht.org.uk.

2 If you aren't happy with how we dealt with the issue, raise a complaint! You can use your online account, email us at feedback@wcht.org.uk, or you can fill out the form at wcht.org.uk/contact-feedback

3 If you aren't happy with our final response to your complaint, you can escalate it to the Housing Ombudsman.

- Visit housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint
- Call 0300 111 3000
- Email info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Anti-social behaviour – help is at hand

Our new online toolkit offers a range of information on anti-social behaviour and who you can report it to.

Introducing our new anti-social behaviour toolkit! This is a new area of our website which provides an easy-to-use guide to help you find out how we can support you with any concerns about anti-social behaviour, or other issues in your neighbourhood.

The toolkit covers issues from graffiti and verbal abuse to parking issues and noise. It's an easy way to find advice on how to deal with each issue and details on the support you can get from us and our partner organisations, such as the police.

If you're experiencing a concern and don't know what to do about it, try out the toolkit by scanning the QR code or visiting our website at wcht.org.uk/asb-toolkit.



Help us improve our complaints process

We're looking for customers to help us ensure complaints are dealt with fairly and effectively.



We are looking for volunteers to help make sure residents get a fair outcome when they go through the complaints process.

As a Customer Complaints Representative you will be assigned a stage-two complaint to look at. We'll give you an information pack and the relevant policies then, once you have reviewed everything, you will meet with the Investigating Manager to make sure the resident had a fair investigation.

As a tenant yourself, you will be able to see it from their perspective. Your aim will be to make sure we are responding in the correct manner, to hold us accountable, and to help us make improvements that reflect what matters most to our residents.

Register your interest by emailing CustomerRelationsTeam@wcht.org.uk.

Thank you for your honest feedback

In April 2023, it became law for landlords to report 'tenant satisfaction measures' (TSMs) to the Regulator of Social Housing.

TSMs are a series of surveys that assess how well social housing landlords across England are doing at providing good-quality homes and services.

We would like to say thank you to the 1,260 residents who gave their honest feedback to Pexel across the two rounds of the survey. Your collated feedback will allow you to see more clearly how we are performing and the areas we need to improve – holding us to account.

We are pleased to have seen an increase in satisfaction in terms of complaint-handling and repairs, but we know there is a lot more work to be done.

Next steps:

The results will be shared with your resident representatives on the Gateway Membership Team and Customer Experience Committee, and sent to the Regulator of Social Housing in April.

As part of this year's Big Door Knock event in June we will be sharing an action plan of the improvements we will make – so keep an eye out for our next edition of Voice!



Stay safe from scams!

If you receive a letter, phone call, email or a visitor to your home that you aren't sure about, you should contact us directly to check if it is from us or one of our contractors – remember, we will always be carrying photo ID.

Always be alert when dealing with unknown or unplanned calls, emails, or texts. Never give out personal information such as your bank details or address when dealing with someone you aren't sure is legitimate.

If someone is contacting you claiming to be from a reputable organisation, but they don't know your correct details, then it is likely to be a scam. If that happens stop talking to them immediately and do not give them any of your personal information.

Choose strong passwords for websites and online accounts – and change them regularly.

For more tips and information about staying safe from scammers, visit our website at wcht.org.uk/staysafe or scan the QR code.



Retaining our top ratings for governance and viability

We are pleased to confirm that we have retained our G1 and V1 ratings for governance and viability!

These are the highest ratings we can receive from the Regulator of Social Housing, meaning that we are considered to be financially secure and well-governed, and therefore are able to continue providing good-quality homes and services for our residents and communities.

To hear what our Chief Executive had to say about the ratings, scan the QR code.



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

Make your voice heard

We're committed to putting tenants at the heart of our work. In fact, because we are a 'community gateway' housing association, Watford Community Housing tenants have more power to influence what we do than most social housing residents across the country.

Under the community gateway model, you can become a full member if you are a tenant, shared owner or leaseholder – or you can be an associate member if you live in our local communities.

Being a full member allows you to:

- elect tenants, shared owners and leaseholders to the Gateway Membership Team (GMT)
- join the GMT! This year we will be sending out information about the candidates by text and email so you can see what skills they bring to the table.
- get information about member-only events, free training and career opportunities
- attend our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and vote to influence our policies, services and key decisions. We'll also be starting to think about ideas for our next 2025/30



Business Plan, which we'll produce in consultation with tenants and the GMT.

- stand as a Group Board Member
- have a direct relationship with the staff and tenants involved in making key decisions

To find out more and sign up now, visit www.wcht.org.uk/membership. Alternatively, call us on 0800 218 2247.

Join the GMT!

- Help shape our future
- Ensure that the most vulnerable people in your community get the support they need
- Make sure that tenants' voices are heard

To find out more, get in touch, visit wcht.org.uk/join-the-gmt or scan the QR code.



Make sure we have the correct email address for you before this year's AGM!

Each year we send our members an information pack that tells them everything they need to know about how to vote in our Annual General Meeting (AGM). This year we want to send as many packs as possible by email so that we can save on postage costs and waste – the less we spend on postage, the more we have to spend on improvements to tenants' homes and services!

You can update your details through your online account, or contact us by phone or email.

