

Summer 2024

voice

special
edition

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing



THE BIG DOOR CK

Thursday 20 June 2024:

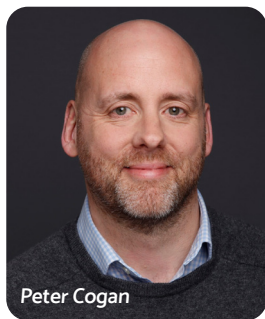
Meet our team and have your say!

Find out more inside


watford
community
housing

Welcome to this special edition of **voice**

Voice is our quarterly magazine, packed full of the latest news from Watford Community Housing. You've received this issue of Voice as part of our fourth annual Big Door Knock on 20 June. We spoke to Peter Cogan, Group Director of Operations, to find out more about the Big Door Knock and what the day will mean for you.



Peter Cogan

What is The Big Door Knock?

Peter: The Big Door Knock is the biggest and most exciting event we have on our annual calendar! Each year all of our

staff head out into our neighbourhoods to visit our residents in person. It gives you the opportunity to speak to us in person and give us any feedback or raise any concerns you have. We then take all this feedback on board so that we can make positive changes to the services we provide for you.

What do you enjoy most about The Big Door Knock?

Peter: I love that it gives all our staff the chance to see some of our neighbourhoods that they may have never seen before, and for many they get to put faces to names. What I personally love the most is that I get to learn what



matters most to our residents, directly from you.

What improvements have been made since the last Big Door Knock?

Peter: Last year's Big Door Knock helped us to identify a number of issues that we've now taken action on. Here are some of the key issues we've tackled as a result of your feedback last year:

Damp and mould – we asked you whether you had any concerns about damp and mould in your home and 73% said they had no issues. All remaining customers who had concerns were referred to the Asset and Compliance team for action to be taken. To ensure we are answering all queries correctly and that no cases get missed, we created a dedicated email inbox for damp and mould enquiries, which is monitored by a project surveyor who has experience with damp and mould. We also now have three damp and mould surveyors and two members of our Repairs team who undertake mould washes and treatments.

Improving communication around repairs – residents said they were dissatisfied with the communication they received from our contractors, so we ran a scrutiny session with residents to delve deeper into the subject. From your feedback we have created a contractor postcard so customers can rebook missed appointments with ease, and we will be building a communication portal so you can receive messages and updates from the operatives, just as you do with our in-house Repairs team. We have also made improvements to our communications around repairs carried out by our in-house team, giving you more frequent updates and information.

These were some of the main themes, but of course we focused on individual issues too. If you brought something up at the last Big Door Knock and you feel it hasn't been dealt with yet, please let us know again and we can make it a priority.

Why didn't I get a knock on my door?

Peter: If this magazine that you are reading was posted through your letterbox instead of being handed to you in person, that means that unfortunately we didn't manage to catch up with you during the Big Door Knock.



In numbers – The Big Door Knock 2023!

- We knocked on 4,366 people's doors!
- 77% of residents were either fairly satisfied or very satisfied living in their home.
- 29% of our residents were interested in getting involved in their local community.
- 90% of our Independent Living residents were satisfied with our services.

However, we'd still love to hear from you! If there is anything you would like to discuss with us, we can arrange for a team to visit your home on another day, at a more suitable time for you!

To arrange a visit, you can get in touch with our Community team on community@wcht.org.uk.

And remember, you don't have to wait until the next Big Door Knock to give us feedback! You can contact us at any time by emailing enquiries@wcht.org.uk, visiting wcht.org.uk/feedback, calling us on **0800 218 2247**, or by speaking to our staff in person.

Continuing our work with Accuro

Working with residents, we have reappointed our cleaning and grounds maintenance contractor.



Following consultation with residents, Accuro has won the contract to continue as our cleaning and grounds maintenance contractor for the next few years.

What do Accuro do?

The contract covers the communal areas and outside spaces that we are responsible for in our neighbourhoods.

The work they do varies in each block and area, but common tasks include:

- Cutting the grass and shrubs
- Planting hedges
- Assisting the team with 'No Mow May' and maintaining meadow areas
- Deep cleans of communal areas
- Window cleaning

Why were they picked?

We held a Tenant Question Time and

a survey to ask residents what they thought of the service and what could be improved.

We took all of your personal experiences and feedback on board to set new requirements for the contractor to meet. Each potential contractor answered the same questions. Then, with support from a group of residents, we evaluated and scored their answers and went to see them in action.

We decided to reappoint Accuro as they scored highly in quality and cost-effectiveness for both cleaning and grounds maintenance.

For more detail on what this means for your services, scan the QR code.



How long will my repair take?

If you request a repair, we'll carry it out as quickly as we can. How long it takes will depend on the type of repair you have requested and how much demand there is for that type of job at the moment, as your job will need to be allocated to an operative with the right skills.

Visit our website to see the current average waiting times for the different types of repairs we offer – go to wcht.org.uk/repairs.



Have we got your correct contact details?

We regularly send out texts and emails just to your local area, updating you when something is happening in your community. Using our secure systems, we can let you know about anything that might affect you and your home, such as works being carried out in your area, as well as events in your community.

It's important that we have the correct contact information for you so that we can deliver a better service to you, keep you informed and ensure that your housing officer can contact you easily to provide support.

To update your details, email enquiries@wcht.org.uk – say "this is my email address" and include your name, mobile number, address and tenancy number, if you know it. You can also update your details through your online account at wcht.org.uk or by calling 0800 218 2247.

Damp and mould concerns? We're here to help!

If you have any concerns about damp, mould or condensation in your home, please let us know straight away.

We are here to offer help and guidance in resolving these problems and we will make sure that any serious issues are followed up and dealt with as soon as possible.

Email: enquiries@wcht.org.uk

Call: 0800 218 2247



Acting on your feedback

We use all the feedback you give us to improve the service we provide. In 2023/24 we received 177 complaints – here are some of the improvements we made as a result:

- We now update our repairs website page frequently to reflect timescales for different types of repair.
- We work with residents to ensure that complaint responses meet any additional needs such as disabilities or different languages.
- We have implemented a call-back function which enables residents to leave their contact details and retain their queue position rather than waiting on the line.
- The Customer Services team recently participated in a 'difficult conversations' course, and completed in-house training on direct debits, and rents and service charges.

You can make a complaint through your account at wcht.org.uk, by emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk, by filling out the form at wcht.org.uk/feedback or by calling us on **0800 218 2247**.

Tenant satisfaction measures survey

We'll publish the complete survey results at the end of June, but here is sneak peek at what you had to say!



In April 2023, it became law for landlords to report 'tenant satisfaction measures' (TSMs) to the Regulator of Social Housing. TSMs are standardised questions that we ask residents to assess how well we are doing at providing good-quality homes and services, and where to improve so we can get it right for our customers.

Using a trusted independent survey provider, Pexel, we surveyed 1,260 residents. Thank you to everyone who took the time to give us feedback.

Compared to our initial surveys in 2022/23, we saw improvement in 9 out of the 12 TSMs, showing that we're moving in the right direction.

The three areas where we saw the most improvement were:

- How we handle your complaints – +6.8%
- Listening to your views – +5.6%
- Repairs satisfaction – +5.5%

The full breakdown of the results, and how we plan to improve low-scoring areas, will be published on our website soon.

We will begin our next round of surveys in June, so please keep an eye out for a call from Pexel from their dedicated phone number – **020 4538 9096**.



Stay fire-safe this summer

For many people, when the sun comes out, so does the barbecue. Here is how you can keep your friends, family and neighbours safe this summer:

- Never use a barbecue indoors, or on a balcony or roof terrace
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby
- When you're done, let the ashes cool for at least 48 hours – do not empty into your bin
- Always keep your stairs and exit routes clear – know your evacuation plan
- Test your smoke and carbon dioxide alarms regularly
- In an emergency, call 999

Introducing Tenant Board Member, Simon David!

Simon is a Watford Community Housing tenant who also sits on our Group Board. We caught up with him to learn more about his role.



Simon is a current Tenant Board Member and has been working with Watford Community Housing for two years. This is what he had to say about his experience.

What do you enjoy most about being a Tenant Board Member?

The support from the entire team has been amazing. They've all been instrumental in making me feel welcome

and have each assisted in their own way to help me build my confidence and contribute my ideas as a tenant without experience of working in housing. By working alongside the team, I've learnt more than I could've imagined about the day-to-day challenges and triumphs of Watford Community Housing, which would've gone completely unnoticed and unacknowledged by me as a tenant, had I not applied to become a Tenant Board Member and given myself the chance to learn and understand more.

How has the experience as a Board Member helped you develop?

I gained a genuine understanding of the recruitment process for Watford Community Housing and the role that every new member of the team plays in creating a positive, progressive and problem-solving culture within the organisation. For me, joining as a Tenant Board Member at end of the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the relationship

between the housing industry, residents, and central government. I was able to see first-hand how Watford Community Housing made key decisions to navigate internal, external and political uncertainty, and I developed a stronger appreciation of my role and the contribution of all Board Members to the organisation.

What advice would you give someone interested in becoming a Tenant Board Member?

If you're a tenant of Watford Community Housing, your experience would be valuable and vital to the team. It doesn't matter whether you have an understanding of the housing industry, as this can be where your experience as a tenant aligns with understanding the day-to-day reality from behind the scenes of the organisation. The Group Board can help you to build your confidence and ensure that your contributions are meaningful for you, the organisation and for all tenants just like you. So, go for it!

Want to expand your skills and experience?

Watford Community Housing can have up to two tenants sit on our Group Board, so if you're a tenant, leaseholder or shared owner and want to gain new skills, meet new people and help to improve our services, we want to hear from you!

What are the benefits of being a Board Member?

- It is a paid role! You will get £4,500 per year
- You will get free access to high-level training and the chance to develop your skills
- You will get brilliant networking opportunities with free access to events and conferences
- You will also get free IT equipment and a dedicated mentor you can contact at any time
- You will make sure residents and community are at the forefront of the Board's decision-making

To find out more about becoming a Tenant Board Member, get in touch by emailing governance@wcht.org.uk.



Looking for money advice?

Citizens Advice Watford is an independent local charity providing a dedicated money and debt advice service.

None of us can know when money worries will come our way – Citizens Advice know that many people are struggling with the cost of living at the moment and they are here to help. Their advisers can give you expert money advice on debt, benefits, budgeting and income maximisation.

They can also provide confidential advice on:

- energy
- housing
- employment
- family and relationships
- immigration
- discrimination
- consumer issues

0800 144 8848

cawatford.org.uk

Drop-in sessions Monday-Thursday, 9.30am-12.30pm, at St Mary's Churchyard, High St., Watford, WD17 2BE.

Become a member!

We are looking at mixing up our membership offering to encourage more of our residents to become full members. Being a member is the most effective way to make your voice heard and truly make a difference.

Keep an eye out for more information coming soon – or find out more now at wcht.org.uk/membership

Proud to support Herts Pride 2024!

We're once again sponsoring Herts Pride, taking place in Cassiobury Park!



We are thrilled to announce that we will once again be sponsoring Herts Pride.

Herts Pride is Hertfordshire's biggest celebration of our thriving LGBT+ community. This year, it is taking place on Saturday 31 August in Cassiobury Park.

It's a great family event and a chance for people in our community to talk to us to find out more about our housing options, job opportunities and ways we can support you. We will be in the Health and Wellbeing marquee – we hope to see you there!

Talented tradespeople wanted!

We are always looking for people within our local communities to join our in-house repairs team and help us deliver a high-quality repairs and maintenance service to our residents.

If you are a talented tradesperson, make sure to keep an eye on our vacancies page – scan the QR code or visit wcht.org.uk/jobs



Celebrating Chris Blackett!

Chris Blackett is standing down as Chair of our Gateway Membership Team in September. While we're sad to see her go, we're immensely proud of the things we've achieved together in her nine years leading the team.

Chris Blackett has been Chair of the Gateway Membership Team (GMT) for nine years, and has now served her full term, meaning this is sadly her last year in the role. Here is Chris's Watford Community Housing journey!

When Watford Borough Council transferred their housing stock to Watford Community Housing in 2007, Chris successfully championed the idea of the 'community gateway' model to her fellow tenants. Her influence ensured that we became a community gateway housing association, meaning that our tenants have more power to influence how their landlord is run than most social housing residents across the country.

When asked about the transfer, Chris said: "I was so passionate about Watford Community Housing becoming a gateway,

and I still believe in the gateway model as it is everything the new Social Housing White Paper says – tenants should have a say in how their homes are managed."

As Chair of the GMT for nine years, with a small break in the middle, Chris has contributed to some incredible things that have improved the lives of our residents. For example, Chris ensured that our tenants were able to share their personal experiences and suggest how we can improve the way we tackle damp and mould. She has also helped to improve our out-of-hours process and the experience when people call us – making our services better for you.

One of the achievements Chris is most proud of is the Welfare Fund. What started out as a fund intended to support those struggling during the Covid-19 pandemic has proudly continued to support those most in need.

In recognition of her amazing work, Chris was also named as one of the '100 People Who Made Watford' as part of Watford Borough Council's centenary celebrations in 2022.

Sadly, Chris's time on GMT has come to an end, but we are very grateful for the



Chris regularly joined staff on estate walkabouts

incredible work and passion she has put into supporting our residents for the last nine years.

When asked how she feels, Chris said, "It's sad but I'm proud that I have been part of it, and I will always be a part of it in the background – at the AGM, in a tenant resident group and in scrutiny sessions! I hope the organisation continues to ensure that tenants are always at the heart of everything they do."

We are also pleased to announce that Chris has been shortlisted for three awards at the Women in Housing and Housing Heroes awards! We nominated Chris for 'Board/Committee Member of the Year', 'Woman of the Year', and 'Tenant of the Year'. Winners will be announced at the Housing 2024 conference on 24 June – good luck, Chris!

If you would like to be like Chris and champion the voices of our residents, you should join the GMT.

To find out more, scan the QR code or visit wcht.org.uk/jointhegmt



Chris was an important part of the handover from Watford Borough Council when we were formed in 2007.



Chris has never been afraid to get stuck in and help out!

Meet the GMT!

Let's get to know more about the Gateway
Membership Team – who are here to represent you!



Chris Blackett – Chair – “I am the current Chair of the GMT and have been involved since the transfer from Watford Borough Council.” You can read all about Chris’s time on the GMT on page 6.



Cheryl Hollingsworth – “I was a council tenant before the transfer and bring my lived experience to GMT meetings. This year we have focused on property allocations and scrutinising the mutual exchange process.”



Sarah Compton – “I got involved in 2019 after completing a housing qualification funded by Watford Community Housing. I am passionate about helping others and as a disability advocate, I see things from a different perspective.”



Lynn Wheeler – “I’ve been a tenant for over 30 years and was a member of Watford Community Housing’s staff for 17 years. I became a member of the GMT to share my housing experience and to be the voice of tenants.”



Peter Okojie – “I’ve been on the GMT for two years and it has helped me develop my understanding of how tenants are looked after by Watford Community Housing, where to find support, and to find out what’s going on in housing.”



Lily Hendley – “I am passionate about ensuring good communication between landlords and tenants, and I review customer complaints to ensure the right outcome is achieved and that tenants are being treated fairly.”



Tony Lankester – “As well as being a member of the GMT, I am also a resident inspector and a proud mental health champion! I am a firm believer in using my experiences to give back to others.”



Simanga Billiat – “As a health care professional, I bring my experience of care and support for patients to the GMT to ensure it is considered when new policies are being created.”



Hind El Khoumssi – “I became a tenant in 2016. I’ve taken part in a Level 2 Housing Practice course funded by Watford Community Housing, been on scrutiny panels, and have become a Customer Representative and GMT member.”

Tenant Question Time – Your questions answered

3 July 2024 – 6.30pm - 8pm
Gateway House and online (Zoom)

Scrutiny session

17 July 2024 – 10am - 2.30pm
Gateway House and online (Zoom)

Herts Pride

31 August
Cassiobury Park, Watford

Tenant Question Time – Our services (pre-AGM)

9 September 2024 – 6.30pm - 8pm
Gateway House and online (Zoom)

Annual General Meeting

16 September – 6.00pm - 7.30pm
West Herts College

Shared owner session – Our services

15 October 2024 – 6.30pm - 8pm
Online session (Zoom)

Leaseholder session – Our services

17 October 2024 – 6.30pm - 8pm
Online session (Zoom)



Preparing for our AGM

This year’s annual general meeting will take place on 16 September at West Herts College. To get involved and have your say, become a member now.

To be able to join and vote in our AGM, make sure you sign up to be a member by the end of June.

If you are already a member, keep an eye out for your paperwork! It will be emailed to you, or sent in the post if we don’t have an email address for you. You can update your details through your online account, or contact us by phone or email.