

Summer 2021

voice special edition

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

THE BIG DOOR CK

We're here for you, in your community.

Find out more inside.



Welcome to the special edition of Voice

Welcome to this very special edition of Voice – our regular newsletter packed full of news and information for Watford Community Housing residents.

This issue is a bit different, as we will be delivering it to you in person as part of The Big Door Knock, taking place on Wednesday 15th September!

What is The Big Door Knock?

Since March of 2020 and the beginning of the first lockdown we've had to limit some of our services and change how we've worked, to ensure the safety of our customers and staff. This has meant that we have not been able to spend as much time out and about in our communities as we would have liked.

While we've continued to deliver vital services such as emergency repairs throughout the pandemic, the rules have stopped us from visiting residents at home and being in our neighbourhoods as much as we normally would.

With restrictions having now been eased, The Big Door Knock is our opportunity to get back out there – to show you that we are here for you and to really find out, first-hand, how the pandemic has affected you and what we can do to help.

On 15th September, our team will come together to visit almost all of our homes in person. We'll be knocking on doors throughout our different community areas in South West Hertfordshire. We want to hear from you about our services and what matters to you.

Our plans for the future

We'll also be talking to you about some of the exciting things we have in the pipeline, and this issue includes details of some of these plans. They include the launch of our Green Strategy – which will set out how we'll make our homes more energy-efficient and cheaper for residents to run – and what we're doing to make it easier for you to get involved in the work we do, to help shape the future of Watford Community Housing's services.

We have also made some changes to our customer-facing teams to ensure we can deliver high-quality services and support for you. As part of this, you will have a dedicated housing officer who will be able to help you with everything from paying your rent or questions about your tenancy, to dealing with anti-social behaviour and more! You can find out more on page 3.



Get in touch!

We always welcome feedback. If you're reading this because we didn't manage to catch up with you in person during The Big Door Knock, we'd love to hear from you if you have any thoughts to share. You can contact us at any time by emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk or you can call us on 0800 218 2247.

Watford Community Housing goes green

Our aim is to make our homes more energy-efficient and to save you money on your energy bills.

In 2021 we will be introducing a two-year action plan, which aims to reduce the environmental impact of our properties. We know that the cost of household bills is a concern for many people across the country, so our goal is to not only make our homes more environmentally friendly, but also to reduce the cost of keeping them warm and comfortable, to help residents save money.

Over the next two years we will research and pilot new schemes and technologies, and engage with residents to seek your views about what works best for your home. These valuable insights about household behaviours will help us determine which of our pilots is most effective and appropriate to introduce long-term.

As well as working with our local authority partners to secure 'Green Deal' funding, we are actively working with two other local housing associations – B3Living and settle – to pool our resources and achieve even more.

Helping residents save money

As part of our efforts to make homes more energy-efficient, we have already begun working with Watford Borough

Council and Three Rivers District Council to deliver an external wall insulation programme, which will make homes warmer in winter and will significantly reduce the cost of heating bills.

We have received funding to install external wall insulation to 87 properties in total and will continue this programme over the course of 2021 and into 2022.

One of the first people to benefit from this programme was Abbots Langley resident Lesley Clark (pictured). When Lesley moved into his home 60 years ago it was heated by just one hot water tank in the kitchen, one radiator and a coal fire.

Today, we've fitted Lesley's house with external wall insulation, free of charge, which could save him around £225 per year on heating bills. Not only that, but it will also reduce domestic carbon emissions by approximately 930kg of carbon dioxide per year, making the property more environmentally friendly.

Lesley, 88, said: "Now I am getting older I do feel the cold. Rather than putting a blanket over me, I'll have a warmer house. The outside wall in the winter was like a block of ice before – now it will be much cosier."



Have your say on Herts police

You can now use 'Echo' – Herts Constabulary's community voice platform – to let them know what you think their priorities should be and how you'd like to see your area policed.

You can do this anonymously and your feedback will help to shape Herts Constabulary's campaigns and initiatives going forward.

There are three separate areas of Watford being covered – outer, north and central. To have your say, just go online and type in the link for your area:

For Outer Watford, visit:
bit.ly/police-watout

For North Watford, visit:
bit.ly/police-watnth

For Central Watford, visit:
bit.ly/police-watcen

Get crime alerts on your phone

Online Watch Link (OWL) has launched a new app that sends alerts and instant notifications about local crime, scams and crime prevention advice straight to your phone or tablet.

The OWL app alerts you to incidents near your home or current location, if you're in one of the participating areas. You will receive alerts about incidents such as robbery or missing people, and can view anything less urgent on the app. You can also set up custom alerts for issues such as crime relating to local businesses, shops or dogs.

Other features include being able to share alerts on social media, reporting a crime online, and finding out who your local police officers are.

You can download the app by searching the App Store or Google Play for 'owl crime alerts'. No registration or login necessary.

Improving your services!

As part of our commitment to embracing technology that makes life easier for you, we have introduced a great new feature that allows you to track our repairs vans on their way to your appointment.

On the day of your appointment, we'll send a text directly to your phone including a link that opens a map, where you can see the van moving in real time. The system works in a very similar way to how you track delivery drivers or taxis that are on their way to you.

You can also message our operatives while they are on the way, so you can let them know if you've just had to pop out for ten minutes, or if you are in the garden so they should come around the back, for example.

We are pleased to be able to introduce this feature so that you can have more control over your repairs appointments and better communication with our operatives.



Save time – do it online!

Many of our customers have already signed up for an online account, which allows them to manage lots of aspects of their tenancy through our website.

All you need to sign up is your tenancy number. Once you've signed up, you'll need to go through a short verification process, and then you'll be free to go online to book your repairs, manage your tenancy, pay your rent, message us directly and much more.

Visit www.wcht.org.uk and click on 'Your account' to sign up now!

Meet your new housing officer!

We've recently made some changes to our Housing team, to improve how we deliver your services. This means you now have a dedicated housing officer for your area, who can help you with a whole range of things!

This summer we've made some changes to our Housing team, which mean that you will receive a better, faster and more efficient service from Watford Community Housing.

Each of our community areas now has its own housing officer, who will be out and about in your neighbourhood. This means you have a dedicated person to contact, especially for more complicated enquiries, and they will be able to visit you at home to provide any support you need from us.

You can speak to your housing officer about anything - from your rent account and tenancy, to neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour.

For everyday enquiries, you will still be able to contact our team of customer service advisers too. You can email enquiries@wcht.org.uk or call 0800 218 2247.

And don't forget that you can access a wide range of services through your online account. You can sign up or log in at wcht.org.uk/myaccount

If you're unsure about which area your home is in, or just want to find out more about who your officer is and what they can do to help, then get in touch with our Customer Service team.

We are always looking to improve the way we do things and deliver for our customers, and your feedback is vital in doing this. You can let us know what you think about the new team and the wider services you receive - whether it's good or bad - by visiting wcht.org.uk/feedback or by emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk.



Havana Roskrow

Meet our community safety co-ordinator!

As part of the new Housing team, we have appointed a community safety co-ordinator who will work with the housing officers to keep your community safe by tackling anti-social behaviour, liaising with the police and other organisations to help combat crime, working alongside the fire and rescue service to promote fire safety, dealing with fraud cases and more!



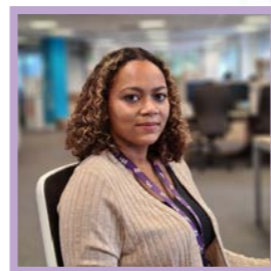
Kate Sears



Sara Povoia



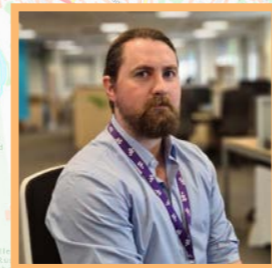
Sharon Binden



Karis Lomas



Donna Andrews



Jonathan Dunn



Joanne McDonald



Romana Lawson



George Aspinall



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Our future plans and our promise to you

Last year, we launched our 2020-2025 Business Plan. At the heart of the plan is our Customer Promise, which sets out the key things we'll do over the years ahead to enhance communities and improve your services.

We worked closely with residents to co-create our Customer Promise, which sets out our main priorities for the next five years. We listened to what you told us, to make sure that it reflects what matters most to our customers. Alongside our partners, we will deliver on this promise to ensure that people in our communities have the homes and services they need.

Here's our Customer Promise in full:



First-class repairs service

We will deliver a first-class repairs service that is effortless and convenient for you. We will carry out property checks to spot repairs issues and fix them before they become urgent. When a repair is needed, we will give you a great experience. This means:

- booking a repair will be easy and can be done at any time
- you will have a choice of appointment times that suit you
- we'll arrive on time and fix the problem on our first visit (on at least nine out of ten occasions)



Safe communities

We know that safety matters to you, so it matters to us too. We will work with partners to ensure that you can feel safe in and around your home. Our focus will be on working with partners to address incidents quickly and effectively, and to develop preventative measures.



Community development

We know that the community you live in can help to make a house feel like a home, so we will invest £1 million into projects that enhance the lives of our residents and help build strong communities. To help deliver the biggest positive impact, we will work in partnership with other organisations in the community.



Flexible housing options

You should have a home that suits you and your lifestyle. We know how important it is to offer flexible housing options that meet people's diverse needs throughout their lives, so we will provide more suitable and attractive choices. If you are moving to a smaller home, we will help you to understand your options and find a new home that is right for you – and we will support you throughout the process.



100 new homes for social rent

Providing people with genuinely affordable homes by building housing for social rent is a key goal of ours – and it will remain so. To deliver more social housing in the places that need it most, we will:

- work with partners
- obtain grant funding
- invest money from Right to Buy sales

Cleaner communities!

We recently hosted three clean-up days as part of the 'Watford Spring Clean' initiative.

In June, we played our part in Watford Borough Council's 'Watford Spring Clean' initiative, with a team of volunteers taking to our neighbourhoods to remove rubbish and waste.

We went to Boundary Way, Edward Amey Close and Swannells Walk with our litter pickers and skips at the ready! We were very happy to be joined by so many great volunteers over the three days including 25 Watford Community Housing staff, colleagues from our improvement programme contractor Engie, representatives from some of

our partner organisations, three local councillors and Peter Taylor – the Elected Mayor of Watford.

Thanks to the amazing work of our Communities and Estates teams and all our volunteers, we managed to fill four skips and collect 27 bags of general rubbish and 15 bags of recycling!

Jean Milsom, our Community Engagement Officer, said: "We had a great time not only cleaning up the estates, but engaging with our communities. We are looking forward to doing more clean-up days in the future!"



Finding a home that's right for you

Did you know that if you find yourself living in a property that is too large or no longer appropriate for you, then we can help you to find something more suitable? You might even qualify for a cash incentive for moving!

If your circumstances have changed and you no longer feel like your current home is a good fit, we'll do our best to help you find somewhere that is right for you – where you can feel happy, comfortable and secure.

Once you are on your local authority's housing register, you can bid for advertised properties that you would be interested in. You can also do a mutual exchange – where you swap your property with someone else who is also looking to move. This can be from anywhere across the country!

If you are looking to move to a smaller home, you may be eligible for a cash incentive of up to £2,200 for making your home available for a larger family.

We want to work with you to ensure a smooth process and we pride ourselves on offering practical support and advice to help you get the most out of your home. Call us on 0800 218 2247 or email enquiries@wcht.org.uk.

We will be holding a mutual exchange event at some of our community hubs, so you can also pop along and speak to our team in person to find out more.

Harebreaks Community Hub
Tuesday 26th October – 12.30 to 3.30

Leavesden Green Community Hub
Thursday 28th October – 12.30 to 3.30

Stay fire-safe!

Here are some top tips on keeping your home safe from fire.

- Test your fire alarm regularly – press the button for a second or two and it'll make a noise.
- Know your evacuation plan. If you're in a house, talk to your family about how you would escape. If you are in a block, then check the signs. If you have a 'stay put' policy, then stay in your home in the event of a fire – the fire service will inform you if you need to evacuate.
- If a fire starts in a room, do not re-enter.
- Keep access routes clear.
- Keep doors closed when the room is not in use.
- Try to avoid using candles.
- Take care when cooking.
- Don't leave electrical appliances such as laptops on furniture.
- You can get a free fire safety check from Herts fire service.
- In an emergency, call 999!



Housing reports made public

The housing ombudsman, which deals with complaints made about housing organisations in the UK, has now started publishing every decision on the cases it investigates – so that residents can see how their landlord performs.

The decisions show the wide range of issues that are handled and how they are investigated in an independent, fair and impartial way.

You can view them at: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

You can also find information on how we're performing at: wcht.org.uk/performance

To find out more, you can read the 2020-2025 Let's Go! Business Plan and all our strategies at www.wcht.org.uk/letsgo

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

Keeping residents at the heart of our work

In November last year, the government published the 'charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper'. This sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that social housing residents across the country are safe and have good-quality homes, and that things are put right when they go wrong. Most importantly, it highlights the need to make sure that residents have a voice and are listened to by their landlords.

As one of only five 'community gateway' housing associations in England, we have always been committed to giving our tenants and other local residents more of a say in decisions we make about homes and services. Under the community gateway model you can become a full member if you are a tenant, or an associate member if you live in our local communities. Members vote on key decisions at our annual general meeting (AGM), which takes place every September.

We also give residents opportunities to get directly involved with our work, improving communities and delivering better services. Whatever skills you have, and whether you have plenty of time to spare or just an hour here and there, there's something for you in our Involvement Menu.

You could help us to review funding bids from community groups, join one of our scrutiny panels to help improve our services, or apply to join our Gateway Membership Team (GMT).

Made up of residents from our communities, the GMT are your representatives within Watford Community Housing. The team meets regularly, working with us to help set our priorities and influence our decisions, keeping residents at the heart of what we do. Over the last year, the GMT has been working closely with our Group Board on key decisions and



with our Community Engagement team to help provide vital support to residents who have been having a difficult time as a result of the pandemic.

Even more ways to get involved

Following the publication of the government's social housing white paper, we want to do even more to make sure customers are at the heart of our decision-making. With this in mind, we are launching an exciting new engagement framework, which is designed to make it even easier for you to get involved with our work in a way that suits you.

We'll be making it easier for residents to engage with us online, as well as in person. We'll offer even more options through the Involvement Menu, along with a brand new

opportunities programme, which will give residents the chance to access a wealth of training, work experience, guidance and support that can help people to live more fulfilling lives.

On top of this, we will provide more detailed information on how we are performing and empower residents to monitor our services more closely. By working with us, you'll be able to help us improve the overall customer experience for Watford Community Housing tenants.

Find out more

If you're interested in finding out more about how you could work with us to help us deliver better homes and friendlier communities, you can email us at community@wcht.org.uk or visit www.wcht.org.uk/getinvolved