

Autumn 2019

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

- **Our promise to you...**

- Find out about our plans for the future

- Supporting Herts with Pride!

- Making Boundary Way greener

- Residents learn the ropes

- And more!



watford
community
housing

Our promise to you...

As we approach a new decade, we are now working on our plans for 2020-2025 – and we are committed to prioritising the things that matter most to you.

Late last year we carried out a detailed survey to find out what matters most to you. We got lots of great feedback and the views you shared with us will be at the heart of our plans for the future.

We are now working on our business plan for 2020-2025, which will include our Tenant Promise – which sets out what we will do to

deliver the things you have told us you want us to concentrate on.

Residents who attended our annual general meeting in September were given a sneak preview of our Tenant Promise. It includes five main priority areas, which reflect the feedback you gave us.

Check out the proposed Tenant Promise in full below. We'd still love to hear your feedback on it, so do get in touch if you would like to share your thoughts.

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 repair 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)

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 for social rent is a key goal of ours – and it will remain so.

To deliver more social housing in places that need it most, we will:

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

Safe communities

We know that safety matters to you, so it matters to us too.

We will work closely with partners to ensure that you can feel safe in and around your home, including dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Our focus will be on working with partners in your neighbourhood 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

Have you created your online account?

Our digital tenancy services are always improving – so now is the perfect time to sign up!

It's never been easier to manage your tenancy, with our online services allowing you to check your rent balance in real time, book repairs appointments – including evenings and weekends – report anti-social behaviour and more!

If you haven't yet created an account, it couldn't be easier. Just head over to our website at www.wcht.org.uk, click the 'Your Account' button at the top of the page and follow the on-screen instructions.

Once your account is up and running, you'll be able to manage your tenancy quickly and easily, all from the comfort of your own home. We're always adding new features to our online services – most recently, we gave users the ability to book the timeslot they want for repairs. Head to our website now to sign up!



How we are working to improve your neighbourhood!

Each year we put together Neighbourhood Plans, focusing on different areas – and asking people what they like about their neighbourhood and what they want to see improved.

This year, the areas that have been chosen are **Woodside**, **Rookery** and **Courtlands**.

We have recently been collecting feedback from people who live in these areas, through an online survey and by talking to residents by phone and email.

Thank you to everyone who has been in touch and given their thoughts on their area – it's important to us to know what matters most to you.

We will now put together a plan to implement as many of your ideas for improvements as possible. We will let you know what will be happening next – so keep an eye out for our Neighbourhood Plans newsletter!

You can find out more about our plans for your area by calling our Community Engagement team on **01923 209183** or emailing community@wcht.org.uk.

Praise for new homes

Residents of our latest developments have been telling us what they think of their homes.

People have started moving in to some of our most recent developments, including The Chess in South Oxhey and Opal Court in Bennetts End.

Opal Court is one of our first developments in Hemel Hempstead, where we are proud to be working with Dacorum Borough Council to provide much-needed homes. The Chess is the first project to be completed by Three Rivers Homes – our joint venture with Three Rivers District Council.

The new residents have had lots of good things to say about their new homes, including Azari Henry, who lives at The Chess: "The flat is lovely! The storage space is amazing and I really like the décor in terms of the colour of the carpet and the walls – everything just looks really new and fresh. The area on the outside is nice too with lots of plants around the car park, so it's really welcoming."



Have you descaled your taps recently?



The area around Watford is known for having very hard water. In areas with hard water, magnesium, calcium and iron salts in your water can be deposited in your plumbing, causing limescale.

These deposits are a great source of food for Legionella bacteria – a bacteria that can cause Legionnaire’s disease, which seriously affects breathing.

With this in mind, it is a good idea to descale showerheads and taps regularly, so that you are protected from potentially harmful bacteria.

Would you like to be a resident inspector?

Would you like to help us ensure services within your community are delivered to a high standard?

We are on the lookout for resident inspectors to carry out inspections and ensure that cleaning and grounds maintenance work in your area is up to scratch.

If you are interested in getting involved, please call 01923 209183 or email community@wcht.org.uk

Making Boundary Way greener

Volunteers have given up their time to plant trees and brighten up Boundary Way.

Volunteers from Watford Community Housing and two of our contractor partners were joined by two wonderful resident volunteers – Paul and Linda – to tidy up Boundary Way and make communal areas greener, on a day that quickly turned torrential!

Our representatives worked alongside volunteers from Accuro – our grounds maintenance and cleaning contractor – and Life Build, the building contractor currently working on the development at Boundary Way.

Not put off by the downpour, Paul and Linda were keen to get stuck in and brighten up their community, having been Boundary Way residents for much of their lives – as Paul explained: “We’ve lived here for 43 years and we’ve seen a lot of changes!”

Linda added: “We just thought it would be a nice thing to do – we would like to get involved and volunteer more in the area.” The pair wasted no time getting to work, weeding beds alongside volunteers from Accuro, the contractor which maintains the green areas owned by Watford Community

Housing in Boundary Way.

With generous £1,000 donations from Accuro and Life Build, the team were able to select a beautiful array of plants to be laid in areas that were in particular need of care. Providing tools, trucks and materials, team Accuro were on hand to even provide a handy step-by-step demonstration in planting for the less green-fingered volunteers.

Jane Pursey, Senior Estates and Contracts Officer for Watford Community Housing said: “We run volunteer days such as this to brighten up neighbourhoods and help bring communities together. They also create an opportunity for residents to get involved and become familiar with the teams working in their area.

“We want to say a big ‘thank you’ to Paul and Linda for getting involved, and to our partners at Accuro and Life Build, who have donated time and money to help make improvements here. With such an incredible amount done in less-than-kind conditions, we look forward to returning to Boundary Way to transform more areas in the future.”



Supporting Herts with Pride!

We were proud to be the main sponsor of Herts Pride 2019. Watford Community Housing had a team of staff and volunteers on hand at the event, and a brilliant time was had by all.

It was an incredible day at Cassiobury Park for Herts Pride this year, where attendees gathered to celebrate their community and revel in the festivities, boasting headline acts from Rozalla and Seann Miley Moore.

Themed 'Pride & Prejudice', this year's event saw an impressive 2,500 people welcomed through the gates with only pride, a warm smile and no prejudice. The wonderful atmosphere allowed us to meet a whole host of new faces and let them know about our commitment to championing diversity and creating safer and friendlier communities for all, whilst catching up with tenants and friends in a safe and open environment where all were welcome.

Everyone was catered for, including rainbow-clad babies and even four-legged family members, with a hugely popular and successful dog show at the centre of proceedings.

Watford Community Housing's Muhammad Akhtar said: "It was great to be the main sponsor of Pride as it returned to Watford this year. The day was a lot of fun and it was good to see all the hard work pay off. We were able to show our commitment to diversity and creating safer spaces directly with our community and discover just how we can shape our work to serve diversity better."



Residents learn the ropes

We've recently supported residents to complete courses and gain qualifications which could make a real difference to their lives.

Working with our residents to make a real difference to people's lives and help create friendlier places to live has always been at the centre of what we do, and our Community Engagement team work tirelessly with our residents to find opportunities for development and growth.

One of the most popular opportunities the team has offered was the chance to study for a Chartered Institute of Housing Level 2 Certificate in Housing Practice. This 16-week course provides a general introduction into housing management at a level equivalent to a GCSE or NVQ Level 2. With this qualification, these volunteers then use this knowledge to undertake an active role in our volunteer scrutiny team – a friendly group of tenants that conducts a review of key services such as cleaning or repairs and presents a report to our Board, with recommendations for how they could be improved.

Three residents – Sarah Compton, Hind El Khoumssi and Cathryn Barr – all submitted applications to the team, explaining why they would be an ideal candidate, and were then selected to take part in this year's online course.

Hind has been a Watford Community Housing resident for around two years. She was inspired to get in touch after receiving a postcard that the Community Engagement team sent out to all residents in January, which asked about people's dreams and aspirations. This postcard reached out to residents, asking them to let us know what they hoped to achieve in 2019 and discover how we could help them on their way. Hind got in touch with us, expressing her hopes of making the first step to a career she had always aspired to and the team suggested this course.

Achieving this qualification could set Hind up for the position in housing that she has always dreamt of, as she explained: "I want to change my career. I had always wanted



to move to social care and started a course online a few years ago but because of so many difficulties, I had to give it up. The qualifications I studied for in Morocco are not recognised here, so to study this will give me the qualifications I need to start my dream career."

Making a difference

Sarah, a relatively new resident with us, aims to make a difference to her community and help people, explaining: "I've been a resident for just over a year so it's all still quite new to me but I really love learning and was interested in finding out more about how housing practice works – and with that, help people... making differences if I can, no matter how big or small."

Cathryn has been a resident with us for over 30 years and has been involved in numerous panels and other community efforts. She is always eager to learn, telling us: "I love learning and I'm quite involved with various things here, like the scrutiny panel and funding panels. I want to learn

more about housing practices as I actually think I have a lot of ideas that I would love to put into practice."

The flexibility of this home learning course has allowed this great team – all with demanding schedules – to study alongside their everyday responsibilities. This gives them the freedom to choose when and where they learn, and empowers them to achieve their personal goals without having to compromise their day-to-day lives.

Hind explained just how important this course has been and encouraged more tenants to get in touch with their own hopes and dreams for the future, explaining: "It would be crazy to waste an opportunity like this; it could really help so many people!"

If you are inspired and interested in developing existing skills or taking that first step towards your goal, why not get in touch with our Community Engagement team today on **01923 209183** and see where it could lead?

Ted talks!

We may have discovered the next Nobel Prize in Literature or Man Booker winner – all thanks to a creative writing course.

Ted Eze, a retired electrical engineer, recently became a certified creative writer and he came to visit the team to share just how much of a difference this achievement has made to his life.

With a longstanding love for writing, Ted's retirement finally allowed him the time to focus on this passion and, with our help, he undertook a 10-week creative writing course at West Herts College to enhance his skills and love for storytelling.

Ted explained: "I've written so many short stories but now I have the skills to bring them to life and create full stories that could even turn into books!"

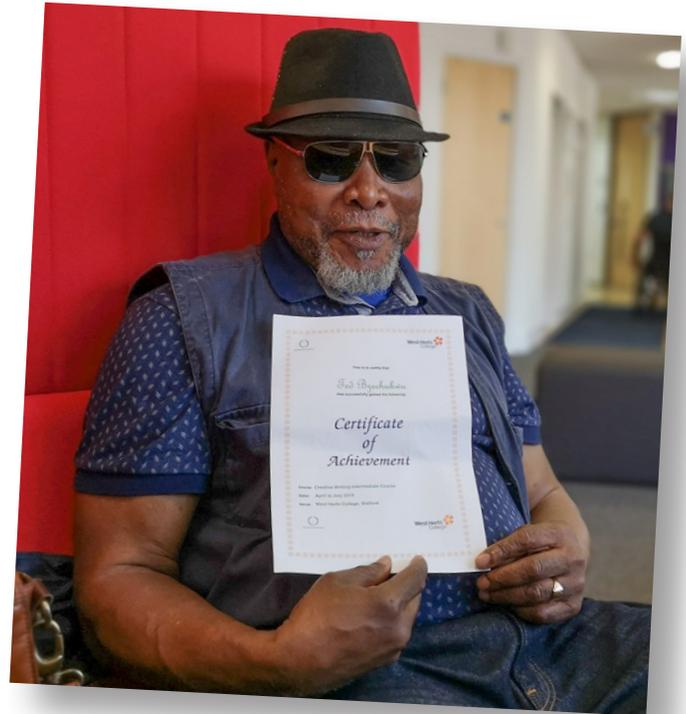
Finding inspiration in everyday events, Ted has planned his first story since finishing the course – he hopes to write about how technology over the years has changed and enhanced the relationships in his life. The way he communicates with his loved ones has changed enormously over the course

of numerous decades, from before the days of the internet when sending letters to Nigeria could take over a week, to now being able to have face-to-face conversations through Skype in a matter of seconds!

A positive impact

This course has also helped Ted in ways we could never have imagined. With recent medical problems that have led him to sometimes struggle with his memory, Ted has found writing to be something really therapeutic, finding a flow when he is creating his stories.

This has had a positive impact on his memory, with Ted not losing his train of thought quite as much as he would if he was talking.



Ted said: "Thank you to Watford Community Housing for funding this course. I wouldn't have been able to participate otherwise and it has reignited my passion for writing."

Helping people like Ted to follow their passions, learn a new skill and grow in confidence is just one of many ways we are here to support residents. To find out more about the support we offer and how we could help you, contact our Community Engagement team on **01923 209183**.

Let's do lunch at Hollytree House

Members of Courtlands Residents' Association and Nascot Residents' Association – known together as 'Nascourt' – have brought their monthly lunch club to Hollytree House, making use of the newly refurbished communal kitchen.

By hosting their lunch club at Hollytree House, Nascourt are aiming to bring together their community with Hollytree's residents. With the new kitchen offering both great facilities and a wonderful amount of space, lunch club service was a breeze, with staff and Nascourt members enjoying the summery atmosphere with a fresh menu to match.

Lynn Wheeler, our Senior Scheme Officer, said: "It's so worthwhile for the tenants here, providing a cooked meal.. a lot of members had joined the group as they felt isolated and lonely at home and they look forward to meeting up with their friends at the monthly lunch."



Members gather for our 12th annual general meeting

Our annual general meeting (AGM) took place in September, with Watford Community Housing members joining us at Gateway House to review the year gone by – and hear about some of our plans for the years ahead!

John Swinney, Chair of our Board, delivered a report on our achievements and how we've performed over the last year, before Paul Richmond, Director of Finance & Resources, discussed our 2018/19 financial statements.

Members were then invited to cast their votes on key issues around how we are run. There were only minor changes to our rules put forward this year, which were around who can be appointed to our Board – to make sure we can get the best people and remain in line with other Community Gateway organisations.

Members voted for these amendments, as well as approving our audited accounts and agreeing the retendering of our external auditors.

There was also a report from the Gateway Membership Team, which represents tenants, on their work throughout the year and Chief Executive Tina Barnard gave attendees a



preview of some of our plans for the future – see page 1 to find out more!

Become a member

As Watford Community Housing is a Community Gateway organisation, all of our tenants, leaseholders and shared owners can choose to sign up to become a member with voting rights. If you aren't already a member and would like to vote next year, sign up now.

To apply for membership or find out more, visit: www.wcht.org.uk/page/Membership/

Join the digital revolution!

This year, 50 Watford Community Housing members received their AGM paperwork digitally – helping us to spend more on improving our services to you.

It costs us around £10,000 every year to print and post AGM information packs to members, including voting slips, details of any proposed changes to the rules about how we are run, and information about anyone who has put themselves forward to join our Board or Gateway Membership Team.

We would rather spend this money directly on improving services for tenants – and you can help us to do this by signing up to receive your pack by email.

If you sign up, we will send you an email ahead of next year's AGM, instead of the usual pack through the post. The email will include a link to everything you need – and you'll also be able to cast your proxy votes online if you aren't planning to come along to the AGM in person.

If you would be happy to receive your AGM paperwork online then we can spend more on improving homes and communities!

Sign up now!

Please let us know if we can send your paperwork by email next year, by visiting www.wcht.org.uk/page/AGMpaperwork/

Dates for your diary

Intergenerational
music sessions
Horwood Court
Every Friday from
4th–25th October

Complaint-handling
training – join our tenants'
complaints panel!
Gateway House,
Clarendon Road
Thursday 24th October

Woodside Community
Association – open
residents' meeting
The Scout Hut, Hope Green
Wednesday 30th October

Leavesden Community
Group – children's
Halloween party
Leavesden Community
Group hub, Haines Way
Thursday 31st October

Paediatric first aid course
Leavesden Green Hub
Thursday 21st November

Get in touch to find out more
about any of these events!

Contact us

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E: enquiries@wcht.org.uk

www.wcht.org.uk