

Autumn 2022

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing



- Out in the community for our 15th birthday
- Our second Big Door Knock
- A successful AGM
- Fire safety advice
- And more!



watford
community
housing

Our second Big Door Knock was a big success!

In June, we held our second annual Big Door Knock, which saw our staff aim to visit all of our tenants in one day and get on-the-spot feedback.

Our second Big Door Knock gave our tenants the chance to speak to us in person – and for us to learn what matters most to you. Donning our signature purple T-shirts and bags, our staff took to the streets across our communities, visiting over 4,000 homes in one day!

We spoke to lots of residents, providing support, logging any issues and listening to feedback. We also delivered a special edition of our **Voice** magazine to every home we visited – it contained information on events for tenants who would like to move home, our Greener Herts partnership, how we are supporting customers with money worries, and more. After the event, we also sent a copy of the magazine to every home we didn't manage to deliver to on the day.

Helping you get online

While on the doorsteps, we helped customers to sign up for an online account. This allows you to manage your tenancy easily and conveniently through our website.



From requesting repairs and paying your rent, to reporting anti-social behaviour and giving us feedback, it can all be done at the touch of a button! If you've not signed up yet, you can do so now by visiting our website at www.wcht.org.uk.

Making a difference

We also spoke to residents about how you can make a difference in your community by getting more involved in what we do. We shared information on becoming a Watford Community Housing member, which gives you the chance to influence our future, and how you can join our Gateway Membership Team (GMT) and have your say over our key decisions.

The GMT is a group of tenants, leaseholders and local residents, who meet regularly to discuss issues that affect residents. As a member of the GMT, you'd only have to commit to a few hours a month in order to meet with staff and Board members and to help influence our decision-making. You'll also be able to help steer our services and

decide where to allocate grant funding – amongst other things!

During the Big Door Knock, more than 160 tenants registered an interest in getting more involved. To find out more, please email community@wcht.org.uk.

Listening to your feedback

Thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts with us on the day. A few common issues brought up by customers were the delays in repairs caused by the pandemic and a lack of direct communication with customers.

This information is incredibly useful, and our teams will be working hard to ensure we provide the best possible services.

We are always looking for feedback from our customers, positive or negative – so if you'd like to let us know what you think of our services, please do get in touch by calling us on 0800 218 2247, emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk or visiting our website at www.wcht.org.uk/feedback.

Coming together for Herts Pride 2022

Saturday 20 August saw Herts Pride take place in Cassiobury Park, where we celebrated the LGBTQ+ community as the headline sponsor.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of Herts Pride in Cassiobury Park and it proved to be the biggest celebration yet. The all-inclusive event is open to everyone, bringing together a wide variety of people for a day of fun and togetherness.

Watford Community Housing volunteers were on hand to meet our customers and communities, offer housing advice, and to show our support and commitment to creating safer and friendlier communities for all.

We had an exhibition area in the Health and Wellbeing marquee, with a large number of organisations providing advice and support on a wide range of services. We had a great time chatting to some of the partners we already work with – including Herts Sunflower, W3RT A Slice of Happiness, and the Peace Hospice – and making new friends that we would love to work with in the future.

In this safe, open and family-friendly environment, we wanted our stall to be as bright and inviting as possible. We were full to the brim with fun things to give away, as well as providing a



game of Giant Jenga and Connect Four. But our main attraction had to be the beautiful sausage dog, Rolo, who actually won a prize in the legendary Herts Pride Dog Show while proudly representing Watford Community Housing!

We are very proud to have sponsored such a positive and inclusive event – we are already looking forward to next year!



Out now – our annual report to residents

Each year we publish an annual report that details the work we've done over the past financial year and how we've performed.

You can read our full report online now by visiting our website at wcht.org.uk/annualreport

Top tips on managing money worries

You will have received a special edition of 'Quids In' magazine along with this issue of Voice.

This helpful magazine is packed full of tips on saving energy and keeping your bills down that will help make your money go further this autumn. We're really pleased to be able to partner with 'Quids In' and to share their advice with you.

Make sure you also look out for the money-saving guide that will be coming with the next issue of Voice this winter.



Here's to the next 15 years!

Watford Community Housing recently celebrated its 15th birthday, and our staff were out volunteering in the community to help make a difference.

In September, we celebrated 15 years since our formation, and we've come a long way to be where we are today!

It was back in 2007 that we bought Watford Borough Council's housing stock, and we've been supporting the communities that we serve ever since. So what better way to mark the occasion than by spending the day out and about in the community, amongst our residents?

Over at the Watford Cycle Hub it was all elbow grease and chain oil as our friendly staff members got their hands dirty with a little bicycle maintenance.

Elsewhere, thanks to Equans, cleaning up was the order of the day! Equans - our improvement programme contractor -

was kind enough to donate both staff and several skips to assist in clean-ups on the Holywell.

Brightening up the neighbourhood

With winter on the way, we wanted to do all we could to bring a little sunshine into our residents' lives. We carried out free gardening work for several tenants, set a treasure hunt for local children and even served a free lunch to customers at Summer Place and Cussans House.

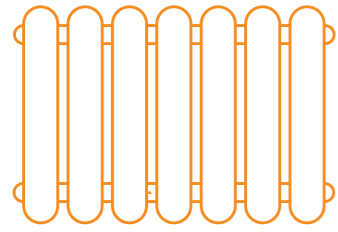
There was also a temporary information hub at Summer Place, where residents were able to join us and Watford Borough Council for a chat, giving us valuable insight into what's going on in your communities and how we can help.

Speaking at the event, our Chief Executive Tina Barnard said: "Today is a day of celebration, and a demonstration of our ongoing commitment to supporting our local communities.

"We're proud of all that we have achieved over the past 15 years, helping to improve access to social and affordable housing, support communities in Hertfordshire and give our residents homes they can be proud of.

"However, in the current economic climate we know that many households will be struggling, and we're doing all we can to help support our existing customers and build high-quality, affordable homes for the future. Here's to the next fifteen years!"





Heating your home safely

Our homes all have built-in heating systems to keep you warm. Rising energy costs might make you reluctant to use them, but we're here to help – please let us know if you are worried about the cost of using your heating.

If you use additional heaters in your home, here's how you can make sure they are safe...

Portable electric heaters

Like any electrical device, heaters can pose a shock hazard and can easily overload circuits, causing a power failure or fire if not properly maintained. Items such as clothes can ignite if they are in contact with the heater and heaters can tip over and become a fire hazard.

These general safety precautions should be followed when using electrical heaters:

- Always buy heaters from a reputable supplier to ensure that they meet safety standards.
- Follow the instructions and never repair appliances yourself.
- Don't plug heaters into extension leads – they may overheat.
- Check heaters regularly – look for frayed wires and remove dust.
- Only use heaters for warming a room – keep them away from clothes, curtains and furniture.
- Never leave pets or young children alone with a space heater.
- Don't leave a space heater on when you leave the house.

Don't use portable gas heaters

We don't allow portable gas heaters in our homes, as they can be very dangerous. To help keep yourself and your neighbours safe, please do not use gas heaters.

Spreading the word on fire safety

Herts Fire and Rescue Service met youngsters from the Meriden to teach them about fire safety and offer reassurance after the fire at Abbey View.



Following the fire that occurred at our Abbey View block in July, we have been working closely with our partners to reassure our residents and ensure they all have the support they need.

The fire took place in the early hours of Tuesday 12 July. However, residents were kept safe thanks to the building's safety features – including the sprinkler system installed in 2019 – and the actions of Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue, which ensured that the fire did not spread inside the block.

In August, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue kindly invited children who live at Abbey View and Munden View to visit Garston Fire Station, to help reassure anyone who has any concerns about fire safety.

Seven children attended the event, which was hosted by Ash from Green Watch in Stevenage. He spoke to the children about what the fire service do – they

don't just help with fires, but floods and road accidents too.

Ash allowed the children to dress up in a fireman's uniform and explained what each section of the uniform does and how it keeps firefighters safe. The children were also shown each part of a fire engine and the breathing apparatus used. Lastly, they got a chance to use the hose and had a competition to see who could knock down a metal plate on the other side of the car park.

The children really enjoyed the morning at Garston Fire Station and all the firefighters were great with them – they took their time to explain how things worked and reassured them to make sure they feel safe in their homes.

At the end of the session, the children were given some goodies to take home and reminded to tell their parents to check their smoke alarms on a weekly basis!

Start a career in construction

If you know someone who is looking to build a career in the construction industry, Watford-based Building Heroes might be the perfect place to start.

Building Heroes is a leading military-to-construction charity, based in Watford. They retrain service leavers, reservists, military family members and veterans in multi-trade skills, creating vital career opportunities.

But you don't have to have a military

background – they offer the same courses to anyone with an interest in the construction industry!

The five-week courses are fully funded, so there is no cost to the learner. To apply, check out the Building Heroes website at www.buildingheroes.org.uk



Housing Officer's Jubilee Medal

Our Housing Officer Sinead Collins was recently awarded the HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal for 14 years' service with the Sea Cadets!

The Sea Cadets is the UK's biggest maritime youth charity, helping

cadets learn essential life skills such as leadership and teamwork through nautical adventure activities. Sinead joined the cadets at age 10 and loved it so much that she started working there when she turned 18. She was appointed the role of Junior Training Officer and was responsible for training the 10-12-year-olds known as 'juniors'.

Now working at Watford Community Housing as Housing Officer for Boundary Way, Sherwoods, Kytes and Welwyn Garden City, she continues to volunteer during weekends and evenings.

Sinead said: "It is a shock and a great honour to be recognised for my service in the Sea Cadets. This sounds cheesy but the cadets are like a second family to me – they helped me become the person I am today and taught me lots of different skills over the years that I use in my day-to-day life. I love how we help young people learn and grow as individuals – it's really rewarding seeing them all achieve their goals, no matter how big or small they are."



Remembering Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



We know that people from across the communities we serve were very moved by the death of HM The Queen.

We will be working with the Gateway Membership Team to consider ways we can commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's legacy, as we know she touched many of our residents' lives.

If you have suggestions you would like to share, please email your ideas to community@wcht.org.uk.

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

A successful AGM!

Our Annual General Meeting took place on Monday 12 September, with tenants joining staff and members of our Group Board at our Gateway House office. Following discussions with the Gateway Membership Team (GMT), this year's meeting was held in person, with the option to also view the meeting online.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, our last two AGMs – in 2020 and 2021 – were both held fully online. However, with restrictions no longer in place, the GMT were keen to ensure that members could come along in person this year.

“It's good for people to have the opportunity to meet the key people, such as the Chair of the Group Board, so that there's a face behind the paperwork!” said Chris Blackett, Chair of the GMT.

As well as the usual items of business, attendees received an update on our services from Neal Tobin, our Assistant Director of Property Services, and Amy Willcox-Smith, our Assistant Director of Customers and Communities.

Representing tenants

There was also an update directly from the GMT, setting out how the team worked with staff throughout 2021/22 to improve services and ensure that tenants' voices are heard. This included carrying out scrutiny reviews, looking into our customer contact channels and how we deal with

damp and mould issues.

The GMT also played a key role in ensuring those most in need received support through our Welfare Fund. This work is ongoing and the GMT is committed to making sure tenants can access any support they need as a result of the cost-of-living crisis this winter.

The team is also supporting our longer-term work to make tenants' homes warmer and more energy-efficient, through our Greener Herts partnership. As part of this, the GMT's Steven Howell has joined our 'Green Panel', a group of residents who meet to discuss and influence the projects we take on through Greener Herts.

Looking back on the year

There is more information on the GMT's work throughout the year in our annual report to residents, which was published ahead of the AGM – you can read it in full at: www.wcht.org.uk/annualreport

The presentation also included information on the GMT itself, and how other Watford Community Housing tenants can join the team, get involved



and help to make a difference. You can find out more and watch our video at: www.wcht.org.uk/JoinTheGMT

Thanks to everyone who got involved with this year's meeting, either by attending the AGM or submitting proxy votes.

Influencing our work

More recently, the GMT also attended the National Tenant Conference in July. The conference is run by Tpas, a national tenant engagement organisation which champions tenant involvement. It's an opportunity for tenants from across the country to get together and find out more about the issues affecting others and how tenants can influence housing associations' work.

Sea, sand and sun in Southend!

In order to give more people in our communities the chance of a seaside break this summer, the Gateway Membership Team asked our Communities team to take some of our lower-income families on a trip to Southend!

We took two coachloads of families to the coast – in total there were 32 families that benefited from this trip, which was made up of 37 adults and 59 children.

They left Watford at 9am and by 10.30am they had arrived in sunny Southend! Every child was given a bucket and spade to play with on the beach and a stick of rock to enjoy.

Most of the families spent the day at the beach, on the pier, at Sealife Adventure, or at the free Adventure Island theme park.

One of our customers said that her children had never been to the seaside before, so she was very grateful for the experience and they were so excited to be going. After a great day of sunshine and fish and chips, it was time to head back to Watford.

