

Spring 2018

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

- Our repairs 'superhero' saves the day!
- How you can get creative at Watford Library
- The latest on the Meriden regeneration project
- Celebrating your community heroes



watford
community
housing

Repairs team ‘superhero’ saves the day

Andrew Wallington, a Multi-Skilled Operative from our repairs team, has been hailed as a ‘superhero’ after he saved a man’s livelihood by putting out a van fire.

Repairs operative Andrew was driving on his way to a morning job when he saw flames coming from the bonnet of a van on St Albans Road in North Watford. Spotting the driver in distress, he immediately knew he had what it took to save the van – quickly pulling around to begin tackling the fire.

Andrew was able to use his high-pressure jetting machine – usually used to clear drains – to douse the flames until they were safely put out.

The owner of the van, Lee Harwood of Boundary Way, said: “I did the one thing you’re not supposed to do when you see smoke coming from your engine and opened the bonnet to inspect the situation – as soon as I did I saw the flames and started to panic.”

Lee is a handyman and gardener, so losing the tools in his van could have left him unable to work. Luckily, Andrew’s quick thinking made sure that the driver

and his tools were safe.

Speaking about the incident, Andrew said: “I had filled up my high-pressure jetting machine that morning, so when I saw the fire I knew I had something in my van that could put it out. It was a case of ‘I know I can do it, so why not?’. I just saw someone in need of assistance and knew I could help.”

Tracey Woods, visiting Watford from Oxford, also saw the act of bravery. She said “It was like he was already a firefighter! He just hopped out with no thought for his own safety and did all he could to put out the fire – he took it on as if it was nothing. It all happened so fast, it was like I’d seen a superhero! It was so lucky he was there.”

Mr Harwood agreed, saying: “I’m very lucky that Andrew was there. I’d like to give a massive thanks to him – without him driving past at that exact moment I could very easily have lost my livelihood.”



Andrew’s manager, Stuart Thompson, praised him, saying: “We are very proud to have such quick-thinking and community-minded team members working for us at Watford Community Housing”.

New community hub now open!

We’re really pleased to announce the opening of a new community hub in Abbots Langley.

Based in School Mead, the hub was previously used solely by Hillside Residents’ Association, which offered it up as a community space to ensure it

could be of maximum benefit to residents in the local area.

It has meeting rooms, a breakout space, kitchen facilities and a garden area – giving local residents another place in the local area to come together for private gatherings and community events.

Hillside Residents’ Association will continue to use the hub, along with the Credit Union and the children’s centre.

If you’d like to use the new hub, or if you have any questions, please email hallsforhire@wcht.org.uk or call 0800 218 2247.

Hampers for community heroes

In January we held a special awards ceremony to recognise some of our unsung community heroes.

We wanted to show how much we appreciate the little (and not-so-little) acts of kindness that happen every day by asking you to nominate your community heroes – and we heard some amazing stories of people who regularly give back to the community.

Our improvement programme contractor Engie (formerly known as Keepmoat) gave us four hampers to give out to the winners.

All nominees were invited to the awards ceremony to give them a well-earned treat and present the winners with their prizes.

Congratulations to all our heroes!



Mavis Garrett – Mavis helps many residents at Hollytree House in all sorts of ways, including doing shopping and laundry, and assisting with social activities. She is a committed volunteer and is involved in many activities at her church, as well as working at the food bank.



Nemo – Nemo has been nominated for her work at Victoria House Elderly Day Care Centre in Greenbank Road.



Daisie Murray – At only six years old, Daisie is our youngest nominee. Daisie saved her mother's life by calling an ambulance and successfully guiding them to the house when her mother collapsed with a blood clot. Her quick thinking and bravery helped her mum to make a full recovery, and she is an asset to her family and her community.



Diane Spooner – Diane has been nominated for her dedication to running activities from the Edward Amey hub. She is always positive and works very hard for her community.



June Mortimer – June was nominated as she looks out for some of her neighbours, shopping for them and generally doing little things to make their lives easier. This includes a lady who was a very active member of her local residents' association but now has dementia.



Matthew Byrnes – Matthew has been nominated for supporting one of his neighbours who has severe epilepsy and rarely leaves the house. The neighbour's family does not live in the country, and have explained that Matthew is 'a godsend'.



Hillside Residents' Association (Dave, Norman, Gail & Bridie) – The Hillside Residents' Association has been nominated for all its good work in this last year, especially for helping at the Meriden Christmas event, which isn't even their area!

Get creative at Watford Library!



Looking for a place where you can let your creativity shine? The CreatorSpace at Watford Library is purpose-built to get your creative juices flowing, and we're teaming up with Herts Libraries to offer free taster sessions!

The CreatorSpace is a brand new environment, built to help encourage and perfect your creativity.

Whether you want to brush up on your I.T. skills on a computer or tablet, learn how to safely operate a sewing or embroidery machine, or try something completely new such as getting to grips with a 3D printer or digital cutter, CreatorSpace can help you upgrade your skills.

Taster sessions are now available for one-to-one tutoring in any creative skill!

If you'd like to book a class or find out more about CreatorSpace, pop into Watford Library, call them on 0300 123 4049 or email us at community@wcht.org.uk

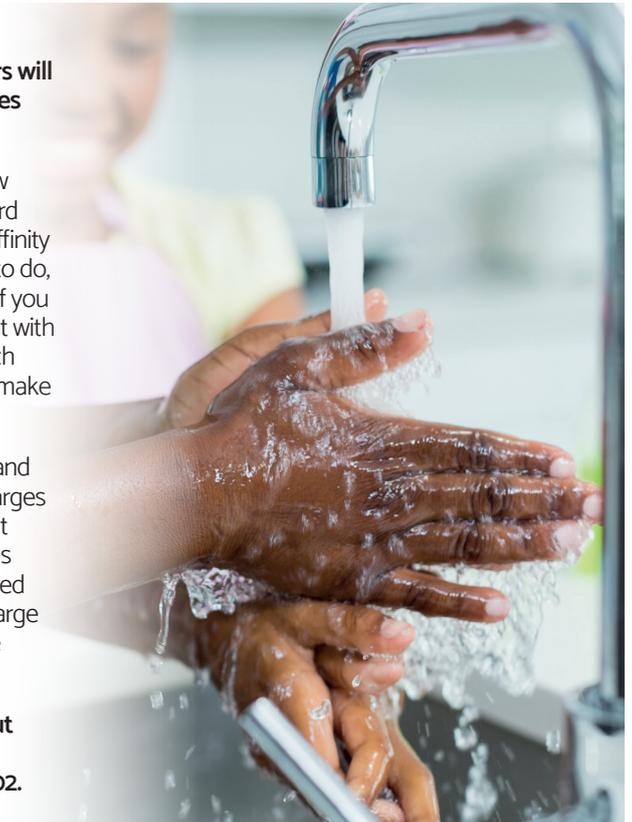
Water charges – are you ready?

From April 2018 most Watford Community Housing customers will pay water and sewerage charges directly to Affinity Water.

If this affects you, you should now have received letters from Watford Community Housing and from Affinity Water to explain what you need to do, along with a new payment card. If you haven't already set up an account with them, you will need to get in touch with Affinity Water to arrange to make regular payments.

As you will pay Affinity for water and sewerage from 1st April, these charges will no longer appear on your rent account, and your payments to us will go down. You will have received your 2018/19 rent and service charge information from us, showing the removal of these charges.

If you have any questions about these changes, please contact Affinity Water on 0345 357 2402.



Help to shape your services

We recently introduced our 'Involvement Menu', outlining how you can get involved in the work we do at Watford Community Housing.

What you may not know is that these opportunities are ongoing and we are always looking for people to share their thoughts and opinions to help us improve the services we provide. Whether you have a lot of time to offer or just a little, we have ways for everyone to get involved.

If you would like to request a copy of the menu – or would like to 'order' – you can get in touch with our Community Engagement Team by phone on **01923 208183** or by emailing community@wcht.org.uk



Moving forward on the Meriden

As part of our plans to improve the Meriden and deliver much-needed new homes, we have now officially appointed Mulalley as the contractor.

The regeneration scheme will be our largest project to date, bringing a brand new parade of shops to the Meriden, along with an expanded community hub and newly-landscaped green spaces. It will also see the construction of 131 new homes for affordable or social rent, a 50-bed extra-care facility for older people and homes for shared ownership.

The project will bring a range of benefits to the local community by creating new communal green spaces and hubs, giving the area a more modern feel and making sure the Meriden is fit for the future.

Split into two phases, the works will cover the central area of the Meriden. Phase one, which is scheduled to conclude in spring 2020, will see the development of the retail block and the first of the new residences, including bungalows and houses.



Phase two focuses on the extra care facility, including a large hairdressing salon which will serve the whole community.

Resident groups and councillors have been involved throughout the in-depth consultation process, and the valuable opinions of those who know the area best will continue to be heard once works start, through a variety of public meetings, 'meet and greet' sessions and ongoing discussions with Mulalley.

Membership update

If you are a Watford Community Housing member you should have recently received a new share certificate with a revised membership number.

We have been working to update our records to make sure we can maintain accurate membership data, so your membership number is now the same as your tenancy number. This also gave us the opportunity to issue new certificates that reflect our new look, which was launched last year as part of our tenth birthday celebrations.



As a member, you are able to influence our services and vote on key decisions. If you want to become a member or you aren't sure if you're already one, please contact Karen Airey on 01923 209061. For more information on membership, visit wcht.org.uk/becoming-a-member

Stay in touch with all the latest news, information, advice and money-saving tips from Watford Community Housing.

Sign up for **voice**:

To let us know you'd like to receive a regular copy of **voice** by post, email communications@wcht.org.uk or call 0800 218 2247.

Sign up to receive the latest news by email:

You can get monthly updates from Watford Community Housing via our digital newsletter. In May, regulations about data protection are changing, so you might not receive the newsletter unless you sign up. If you want to stay in the loop, head to our website – www.wcht.org.uk – to subscribe!



A new name for our maintenance contractor



Our community regeneration contractor, Keepmoat – which undertakes improvement works as part of our planned maintenance programme – has recently changed name, to become Engie.

This means that any communications about our improvement programme will now come from Engie.

We'd like to reassure you that we haven't appointed a new contractor – you can still expect the high-quality work that Keepmoat have done to carry on – the change is to their name only.

As well as our improvement programme, we work with Engie on delivering community projects that create social value in our communities.

Over the past few months alone, Engie have helped us give hampers to some of our community heroes (see page 2) and appointed a resident into an apprenticeship to help them kickstart their career.

Do you need some extra help at home?

We've partnered with AgeUK to offer a handy person service to help you complete small jobs and repairs around your home.

The handy person service is a quick and easy way to receive some help completing those home improvement tasks that would normally be your responsibility as a tenant. You may even qualify to get the first two hours of work for free!

Anyone can use the service, but we will pay for the first two hours of work for people who are unable to complete these jobs themselves and do not have anyone else who can help them.

This means that if you are aged 60 or over or aged 18-59 and disabled, you can receive two hours of free service once a year.

The handy person service can help you tackle a variety of jobs, including:

- Replacing light shades/bulbs/fuses
- Fitting shelves
- Fitting curtain rails and blinds
- Hanging pictures
- Moving/assembling small bits of furniture

Please note that you will need to supply the materials for any work you want to have done. If this is not possible, the handy person can collect the materials for you, and you will be charged for the cost.



If you'd like to register for the handy person service, you can request an application form by emailing us at enquiries@wcht.org.uk or calling us on 0800 218 2247.

Stay safe from scammers

Fraudsters use a variety of methods to catch people out – could you spot a con?



Recently there has been an increase in reports of fraudsters trying to charge people for dodgy repairs. This involves people coming to your home and offering a service – such as clearing your drain or fixing your roof – when works aren't required. In some cases, they will even offer to inspect your home, cause damage themselves and then try to charge you for repairing it.

Once you have paid, works often aren't completed, leaving you out of pocket and your home in a state of disrepair. In addition, allowing unauthorised works to take place in your home can invalidate your insurance.

Don't forget that if you are a Watford Community Housing tenant, many ordinary day-to-day repairs to your home are our responsibility – so the first thing you should

do to protect yourself against possible scammers is to get in touch with us and ask for our advice. If any repairs are genuinely needed, it's likely that we will do them for you at no additional cost.

Please do not agree to repairs or changes to your home without asking whether we would agree first. If you are a leaseholder, this applies to the outside of your home and any communal areas.

Scams usually target vulnerable people, including older people, so it's important to make sure that you, your neighbours and your relatives know how to spot and protect yourselves against fraud.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can get in touch by calling **0800 218 2247** or emailing **enquiries@wcht.org.uk**.

TOP TIPS!

Here are some tips for keeping your home and money safe:

- If a tradesperson visits your home, ask them to show you their identification badge – this should let you know whether they are employed by a reputable company. If you're unsure, you can contact the company in question to confirm the visit is appropriate. Never let an unknown person into your home.
- **Your personal information should stay personal! Never give out your bank details or date of birth to an individual or organisation unless you are sure it is safe to do so.**
- Be wary of any transaction which asks you to pay money up front for goods or services. Without official confirmation or a receipt, you won't be able to get a refund if you don't get what you've paid for.
- **If you don't recognise the email address or phone number that's contacting you, be careful in the conversation you have and never give out your details. Unfamiliar numbers can also charge high call rates. It's okay to say "no, thank you" and hang up, or to delete the email.**
- If you suspect someone or something is fraudulent, take your time in responding. Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion from someone you trust or who is more in the know.

your voice

Improving your services

The Gateway Membership Team has been working with a dedicated team of residents to undertake a scrutiny review of our grounds maintenance and communal cleaning services. It was set up in response to feedback from residents, including concerns over the standard of the services being provided.

The team met with contractors and staff, and made site visits to see how your communal spaces are currently looked after. They also considered how we use feedback, including the text message surveys that we use to monitor these services.

As a result, we have drawn up a set of service standards, to let you know the commitments we've made in regard to our cleaning and grounds maintenance. These are available to read on our website and will also be displayed in all of our blocks of flats.

For your cleaning services, we have committed to:

- clean the communal areas in your block every week
- clean the communal windows every three months

- display the usual cleaning day and list of tasks that should be completed on a noticeboard in each block

We will monitor cleaning services by working with our tenant inspectors to analyse the performance of our contractor. A tenant representative will also be invited to join us at monthly meetings with the contractor.

For grounds maintenance works, we will:

- cut the grass 15 times a year, usually between April and September
- remove litter before cutting the grass
- maintain our shrub beds three times a year
- clear all paths of cut grass after cutting

As with cleaning, we will work with tenant inspectors to monitor grounds maintenance and invite a tenant representative to our monthly meetings with the contractor. We will also invite residents and local councillors to take part in quarterly inspections of all our estates.

We would like to thank all those who took part in the review for giving up their time to help make our services better.

Get involved!

If you like the idea of helping us to improve our services – like those who contributed to the scrutiny review of grounds maintenance and communal cleaning – there are lots of ways to get involved with how we're run.

Over the next few months we'll be looking for tenants who are interested in becoming a Board member or joining the Gateway Membership Team.

If you're business-minded, keen to influence big decisions – or if you are just passionate about improving your community and making sure residents' voices are heard – please get in touch!

Call 0800 218 2247 or email community@wcht.org.uk



We want to hear YOUR story!

The 'Benefit To Society' campaign is a nationwide movement to help change how social housing is seen and end negative stereotyping of social housing tenants.

As part of the campaign, we want to hear your stories. Have you been a social housing tenant all your life? Or are you in a new home and a new situation? Have you ever experienced stigma or prejudice as a social housing tenant? Or maybe it's given you a new outlook on life.

Whatever your experience, we want to hear about it!

Share your story with us at communications@wcht.org.uk

Dates for your diary

Easter Holiday Fun Day
Harebreaks Community Hub
Tuesday 10th April – 11am-2pm

Woodside Residents' Association Annual General Meeting
The Scout Hut, Hope Green, WD25 7HQ
Wednesday 25th April – 7pm-9pm

Hemming Way Opening Celebration
Leavesden Green Community Hub
Tuesday 29th May

Volunteer Fair
The Parade (by the pond)
Saturday 2nd June

Courtlands Fun Day
Goodwood Park
Saturday 7th July

Contact Us

0800 218 2247
communications@wcht.org.uk

