

Spring 2022

# voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing



- Making homes warmer and more efficient
- Improving green spaces for all
- Your Money Matters
- And more!



watford  
community  
housing

# We're making our homes warmer and more efficient

Government grants mean we're able to make improvements which will help our customers save money on their energy bills.

As a result of a recent government grant, 57 of our social rent properties across Watford and Three Rivers will be upgraded to make them more energy-efficient, potentially saving residents hundreds of pounds on their bills.

Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council will share a grant from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), to help fund a £3m project to improve the energy efficiency of 139 local homes, including 57 that are owned and managed by Watford Community Housing.

This initiative will help to save approximately 1.5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from each home in the programme, every year. It is part of our overall strategy to reduce the environmental impact of our

homes as we work towards the target of net-zero carbon, and to make our homes as cost-effective as possible for customers.

## Cost savings

Commenting on the funding, our Sustainability Lead John Swinney said: "This is such important work, both for its environmental benefits and the cost savings it will provide for tenants at a time when prices are rising and money is tight. I'm really pleased that we can provide a service that will actively benefit residents now, but also futureproof these homes for the next generation of customers. It is vital that we continue to work towards net-zero carbon, ensuring that homes are both affordable and environmentally friendly."



## Helping improve green spaces around the Meriden

We've been supporting the Meriden Tree Committee to bring more greenery to the area.

Thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of its members, the group is planning a number of sustainable conservation initiatives that will improve green spaces across the Meriden as part of the wider economic and social regeneration of the estate.

One of the considered initiatives is the creation of an urban orchard as part of a Watford-wide project to plant 10 mini orchards across the town. Watford Chamber of Commerce is running a scheme that helps the community to support and establish an orchard, creating a shared space to nurture and harvest fruit, as well as offering other opportunities to plant trees on a wider scale and make the area greener.

We are helping to fund Urban Orchards - Feeding our Future, which aims help tackle social isolation and reconnect the community with food production, helping

people to appreciate that food is a precious resource.

This is a fantastic scheme that will support other sustainable and environmental projects that are happening across the Meriden already such as the Random Café.

To support this venture trees will be donated by The More Trees campaign, and a local arborist, Nikki Holtom, will train the community on how to look after the trees.



# Family homes unveiled at Luther Blissett House

The Watford FC legend came along to see the finished homes that bear his name.

Footballing legend Luther Blissett (DL)\* joined us to celebrate the completion of the new development which has been named in his honour. Luther Blissett House is part of our £15.2m programme of 56 new homes for social rent, in partnership with Watford Borough Council.

Situated on Raphael Drive, the development includes 12 three-bedroom flats and 5 two-bedroom flats for social rent, which is typically half the cost of renting a similar property on the private market. It is also home to a new community hub which can be used by residents, local charities, youth groups and sports clubs, encouraging the community to come together.

Luther Blissett, a former resident of social housing himself, said: "When I was growing up in social housing, it was almost like a school uniform. No one was looking at what other people had

and thinking of themselves – we all just looked after each other and that created a strong, caring community. That's why I'm so proud to be given the opportunity to put my name to this – I hope these homes will bring their residents a sense of stability and community comparable to what I experienced."

## Providing low-cost homes

Speaking at the event, our Chief Executive Tina Barnard said: "With living costs rising for people across the country, it is more important than ever that we continue to provide low-cost homes for rent. We're proud of the dedicated partnership between Watford Community Housing and Watford Borough Council that is consistently delivering homes for local residents in need of affordable homes."

Our partnerships with local councils and other housing associations continue to pave the way for modern affordable homes that we hope our residents will be

very happy in for years to come.

\*DL refers to the title of Deputy Lieutenant, a Crown appointment awarded by the Lord Lieutenant of a ceremonial county.



# We're an 'Outstanding Provider' of supported housing!

We've kept our three-star status as a top-quality provider of older people's housing, following our annual review by EROSH.



**We're thrilled to announce that the national consortium for older people's housing and support (EROSH) has again accredited us as an 'Outstanding Provider' of supported housing, awarding us the maximum three-star rating after our annual review.**

EROSH assesses long-term housing-related support services delivered to vulnerable people in settings including independent living and flexi-care.

#### So how did we do it?

We've achieved a three-star rating due to our incredible independent living team's commitment to resident involvement and high standards of service.

Over the past year, we've worked with our tenants to develop a guest policy for our independent living hubs, as well as putting together a service user handbook for communal areas which are often booked for local community activities and clubs.

Commenting on the accreditation, Lynn

Wheeler, Senior Scheme Officer said: "I'm so proud of the work that has gone into us achieving this rating. The team have been absolutely outstanding in their commitment to maintaining our high service standards and to improving wherever we can. I'd also like to thank our residents, whose feedback has been invaluable – it's a pleasure to work for them."

By March 2025, we're aiming to have 433 independent living homes in Hertfordshire and to invest £1 million in community development.



## Affordable homes for Hertsmere

As part of our commitment to delivering low-cost homes for local people, we have agreed to form a joint venture company with Hertsmere Borough Council to build affordable homes.

This will be our third joint venture of this kind, following our ongoing success working closely with Three Rivers District Council (Three Rivers Homes) and Watford Borough Council (Hart Homes). The new company will be called Hertsmere Living, and it will bring more affordable housing to Hertsmere.

The plans to create a company between Clarendon Living (our commercial arm) and Hertsmere Borough Council were given the green light at a recent council meeting.



#### What does this mean for residents?

We'll work together to provide high-quality, cost-effective homes, and the council will ensure that these new homes go to those who are most in need.

According to data from the recent Local Housing Need Assessment, Hertsmere households must earn at least £67,000 to afford to buy a property and £34,400 to rent privately. However, the lower quartile income level for Hertsmere's population is £25,300 – so many people still can't afford housing in the area.

This joint venture will give Hertsmere residents on lower incomes access to future-proofed homes at an affordable price.

# Your Money Matters

Citizens Advice Watford are offering Watford Community Housing customers a fast track to free, independent money advice.



We've partnered up with Citizens Advice Watford to launch a new joint project – called Your Money Matters – to give Watford Community Housing customers a fast track to tailored, expert money advice.

The pandemic brought unprecedented financial challenges and many people were unable to cover their costs, leaving themselves in debt. Now, with high inflation and soaring energy bills, household bills are rapidly rising again.

Local charity Citizens Advice Watford will be providing expert money advice, helping any Watford Community Housing customers access this important service to stabilise their finances, maximise their income and find a way forward with any debt.

Tina Barnard, Chief Executive of Watford Community Housing, added: "These are extremely difficult times for households across the UK, and expert money advice



is a necessary service for many of us attempting to navigate these uncertain waters. We're thrilled to be partnering with Citizens Advice Watford for the Your Money Matters project, which will help our residents to keep their finances stable and allow them to plan for a brighter, less challenging future."

To find out more about Your Money Matters, contact Citizens Advice Watford on **0800 144 8848** or complete a 'Your Money Matters' enquiry form online at [www.cawatford.org.uk](http://www.cawatford.org.uk).

## Money worries? More help is available!

We know that some of our customers may be struggling to make ends meet at the moment, and we want you to know that we are here for you. Here are just a few ways you can get support.

**StepChange** is a charity that provides free advice for people with debt problems, either online or over the phone. [Click here to visit their website](#) for a full range of guides and information to help you feel more in control of your finances – they will support you for as long as you need their help. Alternatively, you can call them on 0800 138 1111.

**Watford Credit Union** is a local savings and loans provider for people in Watford. Anyone can join as long as they live, work or study within the WD postcode and are 16 or over (although members must be 18 or over to apply for a loan). You can contact them by calling 01923 236401.

We also have our own brilliant team of Financial Inclusion Officers on hand to give free money and benefits advice to all of our tenants. Our team can meet with you in person, either at our office or your home, or talk to you on the phone to discuss worries in a non-judgmental and safe environment.

Some of the things we can do to help include providing Foodbank vouchers, carrying out affordability checks, and making sure you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.

You can get in touch with our team by calling 0800 218 2247 or [click here to email us now](#).

If you would like more information on our tenancy support services, [click here to read our leaflet](#).

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

### Getting your feedback



Our ‘scrutiny sprint’ events are a great opportunity for tenants to find out about a topic in great detail and influence our services to customers. In February, we held our second scrutiny sprint, and this one was all about the service our customers receive when they get in touch with us, particularly by phone – a topic chosen by our Gateway Membership Team as a result of feedback they’d received about our Customer Contact Centre.

The event was attended by nine tenants, including the Chair of our Gateway Membership Team, along with senior Watford Community Housing staff and Tim Morton from Engage Associates, who was the independent chair.

The attendees discussed a range of information including the number and type of calls we receive and their own experiences. We had a lot of great feedback on the day, and we agreed on some immediate actions to improve our services. These included telling the caller their position in the queue when they phone us, shortening automated

messages so it’s quicker to get through to our staff, changing the music when the caller is on hold and involving the Gateway Membership Team when we next review our out-of-hours telephone contract.

Due to the success of the event, we will be producing a follow-up report which will list tenants’ recommendations for improvements. As well as that, our Gateway Membership Team also held a ‘Tenant Question Time’ event via Zoom during March, enabling even more people to ask questions on this crucial subject.

As a community gateway organisation, our customers are at the heart of everything we do. Holding a scrutiny sprint session – where we condense all the key information into just a few hours – is a great way for our tenants to influence and scrutinise our performance to ensure we are constantly improving our services and our customers’ experience with us.

If you’d like to find out more about this – or about our Gateway Membership Team, which represents our tenants – please get in touch with us at [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk).

#### Could you help us to make homes more energy-efficient? Join our Green Panel!

We’re delighted to be working with two other Hertfordshire-based housing associations, B3Living and settle, to make our homes more energy-efficient – and you can help us to shape this project!

We are looking for tenants and leaseholders who are interested in sustainability – and passionate about making a difference – to join our ‘Green Panel’. The panel will be made up of residents from across the three housing associations and will influence the work we do, reviewing proposed projects and suggesting ideas for how we could work towards our net-zero goal.

You will help us to answer key questions, such as:

- Which technologies should we invest in?
- How do we upgrade our homes without causing lots of disruption to the people who live in them?
- What’s the best type of heating system for residents and the environment?

It will be a chance to meet like-minded people and to learn more about sustainability, so this is a great opportunity to get involved if you are passionate about the subject, or maybe even planning a career in the growing sustainability sector.

You will be able to get involved in ways that are convenient for you, and your involvement in this vital area will impact on what we do both now and in the future!

Email [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk) if you’re interested or would like to find out more – we’d love to hear from you.