

Spring 2026

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

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watford
community
housing

A new chapter – we’re merging with Thrive Homes

Our merger with Thrive Homes marks an exciting milestone that strengthens our ability to deliver reliable services, invest more in our homes, and build communities together. Here’s what it means for you.

In March, we announced that **Watford Community Housing and Thrive Homes would be joining forces to become a new Community Gateway housing association.**

The Boards of both organisations decided to go ahead with the merger after giving careful consideration to all the feedback given by residents during our ten-week consultation with you.

We will formally come together as one organisation from 1 June 2026. Before then, we will announce what the new organisation will be called.

What does it mean for residents?

As a Watford Community Housing customer, you do not need to do anything. The new organisation will become your landlord from 1 June 2026, but there won’t be any changes to the terms and conditions of your

tenancy. You will still have access to all the services we provide now.

The new organisation will be a Community Gateway housing association, just as we are now. If you are a Watford Community Housing member, you will still have all your existing membership rights.

In the future, we expect to be able to invest more in improving your services, because of the extra resources we will have as a larger organisation.

Our promise to residents

Through our consultation, we listened carefully to your views and we will act on them to set the key priorities for the new organisation through to 2030. By coming together, we will build on our existing strengths to improve the services we provide and deliver more for residents.

Based on your feedback, here is our promise to you:



We will deliver an improved repairs service, retaining our in-house teams of repairs operatives and bringing in more people with the expertise to enhance our service.

The merger will not affect how much rent you pay for your tenancy – we will continue to be bound by the government’s rent-setting formula.



With the savings we will make by combining our leadership teams, we will increase our customer-facing teams and retain the local bases we have now – meaning that there will be **more people to support residents and deliver great services.**

We will offer residents more ways to engage with us and find information about our services, giving you more choice in how you get in touch and making it easier to get excellent services from us.



As a Community Gateway housing association, **we will promote membership opportunities and increase the number of engaged residents** who influence our work.



What will happen next?

You will see gradual changes over the next year or so, as we work to combine Watford Community Housing and Thrive Homes into one organisation. This will include bringing everything together under the new identity, so there will be

changes to things like our vans, signs on buildings and our website.

However, we expect some of these items to take up to 18 months, and our main focus is on making sure that your services remain consistent and reliable at all times.

More information

If you want to find out more about our merger with Thrive Homes, there is lots of information on our website, including answers to frequently asked questions.

Visit www.wcht.org.uk/merger or scan this QR code.



Listening to you

Our resident consultation ran from November 2025 to 1 February 2026, giving all residents the chance to give us feedback and help to shape the new organisation.

We hosted a range of online and in-person engagement sessions, as well as gathering views through a survey.

In total 766 households engaged with us, representing around 5% of the homes provided by Thrive Homes and Watford Community Housing.

Here’s what you told us:

- **75%** of residents said that the information we communicated about the merger was ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ clear, showing that people understood the proposal.
- **58%** of residents were either positive or neutral about the merger.

- **Repairs, service quality and trust** were the biggest concerns.
- For **leaseholders**, the cost of major works and long-term financial implications were the main concerns.
- **Better-informed residents** tended to be **more positive** about the merger – people who were clear about the proposal were more confident and optimistic.
- Overall, **residents are cautiously optimistic**, seeing the potential for increased resilience and investment.
- Residents wanted reassurance that we wouldn’t lose touch with **local communities**, and a commitment to **resident-led governance and good communication.**



Welcome to our new residents!



We were delighted to welcome new residents in March, as we took on 509 homes in Hertfordshire from Notting Hill Genesis (NHG).

NHG transferred these homes, along with a small community hub, as it is looking to focus on its homes in London. We were chosen as we are an established provider with a strong track record of providing good services to residents.

As we are a Community Gateway housing association, residents who have transferred from NHG can become members, meaning they can have a say in how we are run, vote in our AGM and get discounts on their shopping.

You can read more about why you should become a member on the back page.



Holywell play area gets a revamp!

We have upgraded our play space in Croxley View thanks to a grant of £12,500 from Watford Borough Council's Neighbourhood Grant programme!



With this generous funding we were able to introduce a brand-new zip wire, a replacement cradle swing, and refresh the play area flooring.

These enhancements were designed to improve the safety of the area and make it more fun for local families.

This is a great example of how, by working together with local councils,

we can create places that support families' wellbeing and make our neighbourhoods even better for everyone.

Read the full story at www.wcht.org.uk/HolywellPark or by scanning the QR code.



Do you have ideas for improving your neighbourhood?

If you're passionate about your neighbourhood and want to make a positive impact, we want to hear from you!

You can get involved in a way that best suits you - whether that's painting a playground, planting bulbs, or becoming a Neighbourhood Champion - there is something for everyone.

Find out more at www.wcht.org.uk/LYN or scan the QR code.



Understanding your rent

We know that hearing the phrase 'rent increase' can be worrying - here is all you need to know about the change and how we can support you.



From 1 April 2026, most social housing residents across the country will have seen a rent increase.

All of our residents were sent a letter at the end of February confirming their new rent, and their service charges, if they have any.

We held a Tenant Question Time session in February to give residents the chance to ask us any questions about how we set rents and the support on offer - if you missed this,

you can check out what was discussed at www.wcht.org.uk/TQTs

As a reminder:

- Rent levels are set in line with guidance from the government
- Our merger with Thrive Homes has no impact on rent-setting

Rent convergence

In January, the government announced a programme of social rent convergence. This is a government-led process that will take effect from April 2027.

It means that rents may increase by a small amount so that similar social homes across the country have fairer and more consistent rent levels, while still staying well below market rates.

We'll share more about what this means for you, and if you're affected, closer to the time.

For more details, scan the QR code at the top of the page or visit www.wcht.org.uk/RentChanges2026

Money worries? We're here to help

We understand that some residents may have concerns about paying their rent, and what they need to do next.

Any actions you need to take are set out in the letter, but as a reminder:

If you are on Housing Benefit, you don't need to take any action. If you are on Universal Credit, you'll need to update your rent amount in your UC account now that the new charges have taken effect.

If you have any concerns about paying your rent, contact our Financial Inclusion team by calling 0800 218 2247 or emailing financialinclusion@wcht.org.uk - they are here to help.



Did you enter our competition?

Between 1 February and 1 April, residents had the chance to win a £50 shopping voucher by updating their details on their online account - there were five prizes up for grabs.

166 people updated their details within this time! We will announce the winners on our website and social media soon, so keep an eye out!



Although the competition has closed you can still update your details.

We need to make sure that the information we have for you is all up to date - such as your communication or language preferences, any disabilities anyone in your household has, and your contact details.

This helps us to provide services and communicate with you in a way that meets your individual needs.

Sign up for an online account or update your details by visiting our website at wcht.org.uk/your-account or scanning the QR code.



You said, we did!

Electrical safety essentials



Here are some top tips on how to protect yourself, your neighbours and your home from fire and electrical dangers.



E-bikes, e-scooters and EVs

- Never charge items indoors, including inside flats, balconies, communal corridors, or cupboards
- Only use chargers that are approved by the manufacturer
- Do not use extension leads
- Charge during the daytime
- If a battery becomes damaged, overheated, swollen or gives off a smell, stop using it immediately and report it
- Keep charging areas clear of anything flammable

- Never run cables across footpaths or out of windows

Mobility scooters

- Must be stored and charged inside the home or in designated scooter stores

Lithium-ion batteries

These batteries are in phones, laptops, power tools, scooters, and vapes.

- Charge on a hard, flat surface, not on soft surfaces, such as beds
- Do not leave devices charging unattended
- Replace batteries/chargers that are damaged or overheating
- Keep batteries away from direct sunlight, and dispose properly – never in household waste

Want to make alterations?



You must get written permission from us before you carry out any works involving electrics.

This can include:

- kitchen upgrades
- installing EV chargers
- fitting new lights

You can find our application form, and more information, by scanning the QR code or visiting www.wcht.org.uk/alterations

Shaping services together

Here are some of the recent improvements we have made as a result of comments from residents.

- We have made changes to the way that lift breakdowns are handled, including improving our callout response time
- We have a greater range of staff available to pick up calls at peak times and have improved the hold music you hear when you call us
- We have improved the data we have for our leaseholders, meaning they can now receive targeted messages about their homes and communities
- We have put clearer parking information on our website, including who is responsible

How to make a complaint

If you have a concern about the service you receive from us, we want to put things right. Here's what you need to do:

1 Firstly, report the issue to us – use your online account, call us on **0800 218 2247** or email our customer services at enquiries@wcht.org.uk

2 If you aren't happy with how we dealt with the issue, raise a complaint! You can email us at feedback@wcht.org.uk, or you can fill out a form on our website at wcht.org.uk/contact-feedback

3 If you aren't happy with our final response to your complaint, you can escalate it to the Housing Ombudsman (HO).

Visit housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint

The HO has recently expanded the range of languages available in their videos, supporting residents to better understand the complaints process. Scan the QR code to navigate their complaints process with confidence.



Free energy advice!



Grand Union Community Energy are offering free one-to-one home visits to all of our residents. They can cover:

- tips to help reduce energy usage and lower bills
- understanding tariffs and dealing with suppliers
- advice on damp and mould
- information on support available
- guidance on insulation and home efficiency

Book your free home visit by going to our website at wcht.org.uk/energy-advice or scanning the QR code here.

Did you know...

... that on average, it costs us £125 each time our Estates team need to clear rubbish that is fly-tipped in our neighbourhoods?

Or that it costs around £100 for a repairs operative to visit outside of normal hours?

As we are a not-for-profit organisation, every penny we receive goes back into delivering good-quality homes and improving your services.

Unfortunately, we also spend a significant amount on situations that could be avoided. By helping us avoid unnecessary costs, you can make sure we have more to spend on what matters to residents.

Here are a few ways you can help us to do more:

- Dispose of rubbish responsibly
- Avoid calling us outside of normal work hours unless it's urgent
- Make sure you are at home for repairs, gas or electrical appointments
- Get permission from us before making any alterations to your home



Fancy some funding?

If you have a community project that aims to make life better for local people or the environment, you can apply for funding of up to £500 to make it happen!

In the past year, 28 groups have benefited from our 'Community Chest' funding, including:

- Watford Deaf Club – towards a communication support worker for their craft club
- Beechfield Primary School – towards a sensory space for SEN children
- NeuroRelate – to fund an activity day for local neurodiverse families

You can apply for funding on our website at wcht.org.uk/funding or by scanning the QR code.



Thank you for your feedback



Your comments – good or bad – are vital in helping us to tailor and improve our services.

We sent out a survey to residents of Robin House and Canterbury Road to ensure they have settled into their new homes, and to ask if there was anything we could do to further support them.

The responses were incredibly positive, and we're grateful for the time everyone put into sharing their experiences.

As a thank you, everyone who gave us feedback was entered into a prize draw for a chance to win shopping vouchers.

Well done to our two lucky winners – happy spending!



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

Becoming a member – what's in it for me?

We're a Community Gateway organisation, which means that all of our tenants, leaseholders and shared owners can become members. As a member, you can...

...get hundreds of exclusive daily discounts from your favourite retailers and charity shops, and save money on the essentials that you use every day!

...apply for a role in the Gateway Membership Team. Join like-minded residents who want to inspire change – these formal positions now pay a salary of £2,500 per year.

...join Tpas, and benefit from the brilliant resources they have to offer.

...get access to training and development opportunities, learn new skills and build your confidence.

...attend our AGM, and have a say in our decision-making and how we operate.

...influence our policies, and make the changes that matter to you.

... engage at a time, place and pace that suits you – you choose your level of involvement.

Becoming a member means you can help to ensure that residents' voices are heard and make your community stronger.

Your ideas and lived experiences help make our services better.

If you are ready to get involved, or have any questions, visit wcht.org.uk/membership or scan the QR code below.



Dates for your diary

Shared owner session: Our services – 19 May from 6.30pm to 8pm online via Zoom

Leaseholder session: Our services – 22 May from 6.30pm to 8pm online via Zoom

Gardening competition – judging takes place on 3 June 2026 – keep an eye on our website and social media for more info

Tenant Question Time: Topic TBC – 1 July from 6pm to 7.30pm online via Zoom and at Gateway House

Scrutiny session with GMT – 22 July from 10am to 2pm online via Zoom and at Gateway House

Would you like to take part in any of the sessions?

Email the Community team at community@wcht.org.uk to find out how you can get involved.

