

Summer 2018

# voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

- How residents are helping to shape our services
- Easter excitement and half-term happiness!
- Our new online services are here
- Have your say at our AGM



watford  
community  
housing

# Are you using our new online service?

We want to help make your life easier, so we've launched new digital tenancy services so you can manage your rent account, request repairs and more!

We recently launched a brand new set of services that are available through our website. With an online account you can see live rent account data, request repairs, report anti-social behaviour, update your tenancy details and more.

We've designed these services to make life easier for you, so your account is full of fast, efficient ways to keep your home and tenancy in good shape.

## How do I sign up?

- First, visit [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk). Click the 'My Account' button at the top of the page, then 'Create new account'.
- Select whether you are a Watford Community Housing tenant/shared owner or an owner/leaseholder.
- Next, fill out the registration form. You'll need the first eight digits of your tenancy number. You can find this on your rent statement under 'account number'. Once you've completed the form, click 'register'.
- Before you can begin using your account, we need to check that the details you've entered match the details we hold for you. Once we've



approved your registration, we'll send a verification code to the email address you signed up with.

- Once you have your verification code, visit the 'Login' page and enter your username and password. You can get to this page at any time by repeating the first step.
- When asked, enter your code.
- That's it! You're all signed up – you can now enjoy your new account.

It's important to note that even if you had an account with us previously, you'll need a new username and password to access the upgraded online services.

## More to come!

We're going to be adding even more features to our digital tenancy services over the next few months, so keep your eyes peeled for updates!

If you would like some help setting up your online account, or if you have any questions about our digital service, get in touch on **0800 218 2247**.

We'd also like to know what you think of the new online service! You can share your feedback with us by emailing [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk).

## Your privacy matters

We're making it easy for you to find out how we handle your information. Ahead of new data privacy laws which came into force in May, we updated our privacy policies to tell you how we're using your personal information, why we use it in this way, how long we keep it for, who we may share your information with and your rights under the new law.

We take your privacy seriously, so we've set out everything you need to know in a booklet called 'Your Privacy Matters'. You can download it from our website – [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk) – or you can email us on [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk) or call us on **0800 2182247** to request a copy.



# Stars in their eyes

We recently supported the South West Herts Astronomical Society's amazing stargazing event in Cassiobury Park.

**South West Herts Astronomical Society recently held a stargazing event in Cassiobury Park, with help from Watford Community Housing.**

It celebrated all things space-age and included displays of real life moon rocks, a space suit, virtual reality headsets and state-of-the-art telescopes to help children and adults alike look to the skies. Despite cloudy weather, the event was a huge hit, with over 400 people attending. Our stall attracted plenty of visitors who

wanted to take part in our Planet Hunt, which involved learning about space whilst competing for a prize!

Volunteers from Watford Community Housing, whilst not exactly space experts, brought other talents to the event too – including glitter tattooing, arts and crafts and sharing news about how we can help residents and local community groups.

The event was a great success, so watch this space (and the real space!) for more information about astronomical events.



## Helping you stay on track with Universal Credit



Since the introduction of Universal Credit in 2017, we've been helping those of you affected to stay on top of your finances. In the last six months alone, we've helped over 150 people to access more than £100,000 in additional financial assistance.

If you're being switched to Universal Credit, we step in as soon as possible to offer support, guidance and to work on a sustainable future payment plan. For example, if your housing benefit is becoming a Universal Credit payment, we can advise you on how to apply for funds that will help you through the transition.

So, although we can't directly contact Universal Credit or the Housing Benefit providers, we can help you to manage your rent and stay on top of your finances.

**If you'd like help with managing your rent payments, our Tenancy Support Officers are here to help. You can get in touch by calling 0800 218 2247.**

## Could you spare an hour a month?



We're looking for residents to help us allocate funding to fantastic local community projects. By giving up just a small amount of time you can improve your local community by helping us decide which projects we support.

The role involves receiving one email per month detailing funding applications that we have received – all we ask is for you to reply with some feedback. We have recently allocated funding to organisations such as the 'Cafe in the Library' (pictured), Watford Foodbank, Home Start, local residents' groups and more.

To find out more, please contact the Community Engagement team on 01923 209183.

## The show must go on

### Movie nights are now back at our Independent Living schemes!

The regular nights came to an end following changes to the laws around screening films. However, they have now been brought back thanks to Val Hubbard – a tenant and volunteer who works with the Quality Development team that helps to improve our independent living services. Our staff took on board feedback from residents and Val discovered a clause in the legislation that made it possible to reinstate the movie nights.

Katina Mailley, Vice Chair of the Gateway Membership Team, said: "The movie nights are an opportunity for residents to come together, enjoy a film and combat isolation. It was great to work with other tenants and staff, and I really felt that views were listened to on both sides. I'm so pleased it was taken seriously as it makes a big difference to individuals and communities."

# Sampling our involvement menu

We're always on the lookout for people who want to get involved and help to shape our services. Here's how some of our most recent volunteers got on.

Last year we launched our involvement menu, which gives residents and members of the community the chance to get involved with what we do and how we're run.

By suggesting a range of flexible options for every lifestyle and ability, the involvement menu offers something for everyone. We've had a really enthusiastic response to the menu, with a wide range of people wanting to get involved.

Three people have joined us for a behind-the-scenes tour, which gives you the chance to come and see what goes on in our offices and meet key members of staff. We have also worked with the Gateway Membership Team to hold five Tenant Question Time events and we've even seen the start of a new residents' association in Woodside!

### Working with us

Two of our residents in particular have had really rewarding experiences as a result of the involvement menu.

Christine Moore, a resident of social housing for the last 46 years, came in for a behind-the-scenes tour. From our conversations with Christine, we knew she led a busy life, so the best way for her to get involved with us was through a one-off visit.

Speaking about the tour, Christine said: "It was really eye-opening. I was surprised

there were so many departments all doing different jobs – I didn't realise how much there was to do! Everyone was very friendly too.

"Whenever I stopped to be introduced or ask questions the staff would take a moment to really get engaged in what I was saying. The best part of the tour was definitely the reassurance that people are working hard and that if anything goes wrong there are people whose job it is to help me."



Another resident who has had a positive experience as a result of the involvement menu is Lucie Summers. Lucie has taken up a position as a volunteer in our Community Engagement team, after we held a 'skills mapping' session with her and identified she had the time and abilities to take up the role.

As a volunteer, she helps to plan events, shadows members of the team and helps with administrative tasks. She says: "Volunteering at Watford Community Housing has really helped boost my confidence and has shown me a path into a job I could really have a passion for. I really want to do something that improves people's lives and helps them to live better. This experience is so rewarding and I hope I can continue to work closely with the Community Engagement team."

If you'd like to get involved, visit [www.wcht.org.uk/involvement-menu](http://www.wcht.org.uk/involvement-menu) or call the Community Engagement team on 01923 209183.

# Easter excitement!

Over Easter, we joined up with our improvement programme contractor to host a fun-filled day of spring activities.

Despite the grey skies, the promise of free fish and chips, Easter eggs and a spot of gardening was enough to tempt lots of local residents to join us at our hub on the Harebreaks!

We hosted the afternoon in partnership with ENGIE, our improvement programme contractor. As well as lots of fun activities including facepainting and games, it gave residents the chance to talk to ENGIE about the works they are doing as part of our five-year programme to improve homes.

It was also an opportunity for residents to discuss some of our cleaning and grounds maintenance services with staff. We will be using your feedback to improve our services and make sure that they meet your needs.

Thank you to ENGIE and all of our staff volunteers for putting together a lovely spring afternoon of fun for the local community.



## Are you over 50 and looking for a new activity?

The 'Nifty Over Fifty' group is made up of volunteers who provide activities for older people in Watford and beyond, supported by Watford Community Housing. Whether you want to keep your fingers busy with a fun new hobby, go on a day trip or just make some new friends, Nifty Over Fifty has something for you!

The group hosts a wide range of activities which run throughout the year, and most of the weekly or monthly classes and meet-ups require no booking – you can just turn up!



If you'd like to find out more and start reading about all of the events hosted by the Nifties, get in touch with the Community Engagement team on 01923 209183 and ask for your copy of Nifty News!

## Are you a single parent looking for a chance to socialise?

We know that being a single parent can be isolating and difficult at times – but with the right support and advice, it can be truly rewarding.

Gingerbread, a charity which supports single parents, offers the opportunity for local areas to set up 'friendship groups', which are run by single parents, for single parents. We want to help set up one of these groups for residents in Watford and beyond. The group will be a flexible, friendly and fun place for single parents to make friends. How the group works is up to you!

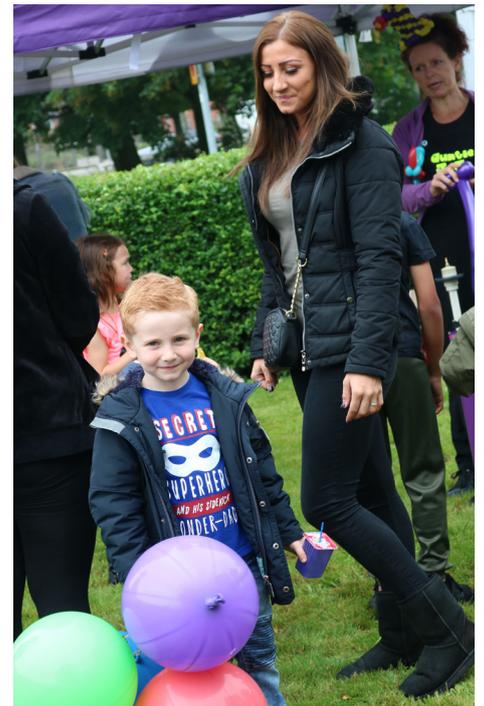
With a place to play for the kids, advice, support and the opportunity for day trips or activities, the Gingerbread group will help you to meet people in a friendly environment that's built just for you.

If you're interested in joining the Gingerbread group, email [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk).



# Half-term happiness at our hubs!

Our community hubs in Hillside and Leavesden Green played host to two great events for local residents over the half term week.



## During half term we held two fabulous fun days at our community hubs.

The first, held at Leavesden Green hub, celebrated the opening of 32 new affordable homes on Hemming Way and the revamped entrance to Leavesden Park. The other event was also a celebration, this time of the brand new Hillside hub in Abbots Langley.

Both events were a fantastic chance for our communities to come together and have an afternoon of fun. Despite the slightly grey weather (or pouring rain in the case of the Leavesden Green fun day!), all the activities went ahead, and staff and entertainers put on a great day for families and volunteers alike.

At Leavesden Green, where we welcomed the new residents of Francis House and Joseph House, the weather made a

big mark on the day – but that's never stopped us before! Lots of you came along and enjoyed playing on the inflatables, decorating cupcakes and witnessing some very well-groomed pets in our dog show. Our judges, Chief Executive Tina Barnard and Director of Partnerships Gareth Lewis, got to award some of the cutest pups ever rosettes in a wide range of categories. Also, our Director of Finance and Resources Paul Richmond showed off his face painting and glitter tattooing skills, and they proved very popular – he was busy all afternoon!

The Hillside hub fun day was slightly less rainy and every bit as fun! This time, the main attractions were the free ice cream on offer courtesy of Tonino & Son, face painting and



balloon animals – all of which went down a treat for local children and families.

We'd like to thank everyone who came along to the events, as well as all of the stall-holders, volunteers and staff members who made an incredible effort in order to pull off two wonderful fun days.

**If you'd like to book either of our hubs for your event, group or meeting, head to our website at [www.wcht.org.uk/halls](http://www.wcht.org.uk/halls) or give us a ring on 01923 679664.**

# Are you a ‘dementia friend’?

We recently held three sessions to offer advice on supporting sufferers of dementia, as well as their friends and family.

In the first of a series of sessions to help raise awareness of key issues in the community, we hosted three ‘Dementia Friends’ events across Watford.

These events offered information on different types of dementia and how to detect it. The sessions also offered advice on how to support sufferers of dementia, along with friends and family members affected by dementia.

As part of our commitment to diversity and inclusion, we are looking to run a series of sessions to help tackle key issues that affect people in our communities. We asked residents to request topics and dementia was high on the list of suggestions.

We’re proud to be able to offer opportunities to learn about difficult subjects – keep an eye out for more in the near future.



## Development update!

It’s really important that we do our bit to ease the national housing crisis by building more homes for people in Watford and beyond – in fact, we’re aiming to have developed 1,000 new homes by 2020. Here’s an update on a couple of our current developments.

### Hemming Way

In February 2018, we finished building 32 modern homes for affordable rent on Hemming Way (pictured). The two new buildings, Francis House and Joseph House, have now opened, and residents have begun moving in.

This development included some work to revamp the entrance to Leavesden Green, making the park safer and more accessible.



### The Brow

In September 2017, works began to build 38 homes, 35 of which are for affordable rent, and eight new retail spaces on The Brow.

The development will replace and rejuvenate the previous homes and shops in the area. Recently, the development took a big step forward as the demolition of the old building took place!

## Are you looking for a storage solution?

Do you need somewhere to park your car or store your stuff?

We have a number of garages available to rent. Our garages are managed and maintained by our partners Secure Parking & Storage (SPS).

If you’d like to rent a garage in Watford, get in touch with SPS on 01923 522510.



## Have your say at our AGM!

Taking place in September, our annual general meeting is your chance to have your say on our future. Here's everything you need to know...

Our annual general meeting (AGM) will be held on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September at Beechen Grove Baptist Church on Clarendon Road.

If you are a Watford Community Housing member you will have the opportunity to vote on the latest updates to our Rules, which govern how we operate. The AGM is also a chance to meet and speak to members of our senior management team who manage key areas such as repairs, home improvements and housing services.

Watford Community Housing and the Gateway Membership Team (GMT) have been working closely together in the run-up to the AGM, to ensure that the changes that are put forward will have the GMT's approval. These changes are designed to ensure that our Rules are fit for the future and help us to deliver better services to tenants.

Chris Blackett, Chair of the GMT, says: "The AGM is your opportunity to make your voice heard and have your say about how Watford Community Housing is run. We have been working to make sure that the changes being proposed this year are in your best interests, and we believe that they will help Watford Community Housing to deliver



better services to us as tenants. It's really important that you use your vote, so please come along to the AGM in September or return your voting form by post."

If you are a member, you will receive your AGM information pack in August. This will include everything you need to know about the AGM, as well as a proxy voting form so that you can cast your vote by post if you would prefer not to come to the AGM in person.

If you would like to find out more about our AGM or becoming a Watford Community Housing member, please call us on **0800 2182247** or email [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk)

### Dates for your diary

Courtlands Fun Day  
Goodwood Park  
Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July

Older People's Activity, Learning & Safety session (for the Watford Deaf & Social Club, with a BSL interpreter)  
Harebreaks Hub  
Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> July

'Dementia Friends' session (for the Watford Deaf & Social Club, with a BSL interpreter)  
Harebreaks Hub  
Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August

Watford Community Housing  
Annual General Meeting  
Beechen Grove Baptist Church  
Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September

### Contact Us

T: 0800 218 2247

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[www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk)



## Make a difference to your community!

**Are you passionate about your community? We are looking for people to represent residents on our Gateway Membership Team and our Board. By working with us you could learn vital new skills to boost your CV, as well as helping to make a real difference in your community.**

As a member of our Board or Gateway Membership Team, you would represent tenants by spending a few hours a month helping us to improve our communities and services. It's a chance to make your voice heard on what we do and the services we provide, as you would offer valuable input into our decision-making as we work to deliver better homes and friendlier communities.

As well as being able to make a difference to your community, you can pick up vital skills to help you in your career. We also pay your expenses and provide you with a laptop and an internet connection.



**If you are interested in working with us to improve your community, please get in touch to find out more. Call us on 0800 218 2247 or email [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk)**