

Summer 2022

voice

special
edition

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

THE BIG DOOR CK

Thursday 23 June 2022:

We're in your community, visiting residents and listening to your feedback. Find out more inside.



Welcome to this special edition of **voice**

Welcome to this very special edition of Voice – our regular newsletter packed full of news and information for Watford Community Housing residents.

This issue is a bit different, as we will be delivering it to you in person as part of The Big Door Knock, taking place on Thursday 23 June!

What is The Big Door Knock?

For those who may not know, last September Watford Community Housing held its first Big Door Knock. As we had to limit so much of our face-to-face contact during the coronavirus pandemic, we aimed to visit the homes of all our tenants in one day and let them know we were still there for them to offer support and high-quality services.

We got great feedback on the doorsteps, with people appreciating the opportunity to speak to us and raise any concerns.

So, following on from the success of last year's event, we have decided to do it all over again this year!

We are holding our Big Door Knock event on Thursday 23 June. Throughout the day our teams will come together to visit almost all of our homes in person. We'll be knocking on doors in all our different community areas in South-West Hertfordshire.



The Big Door Knock gives you the chance to hear from us, but more importantly, a chance for us to learn what matters most to you and let you know about all the support we can offer you.

On the day – and throughout this magazine – we will be letting you know about our exciting plans for the future, including our Greener Herts partnership, how we can support you with any money worries, how best to contact us to book repairs and, most importantly, how to become a member and get your voice heard!



Get in touch!

Positive or negative, we always welcome feedback. If this magazine was posted through your letterbox because we didn't manage to catch up with you in person during The Big Door Knock, we'd love to hear from you if you have any thoughts to share. You can contact us at any time by emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk or you can call us on **0800 218 2247**.

Where and when?

Leavesden Green Community Hub Tuesday 9 August – 130pm to 3.30pm	Harebreaks Community Hub Friday 12 August – 130pm to 3.30pm
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Find a home that's right for you

Did you know that if you find yourself living in a property that is too large or no longer appropriate for you, then we can help you to find something more suitable?

Following the success of our 'Mutual Exchange and Rightsizing' events last year, we have decided to run more of them again this year!

This is your opportunity to come along and get advice and support if your home no longer meets your needs. We will have lots of people on hand to offer information and help you find a home where you will feel happy, comfortable and secure – including someone from HomeSwapper, a dedicated Home Move Officer, some of our Housing Officers and people from our Financial Inclusion team.

There will also be refreshments available and soft play to keep the kids entertained while you chat to us!

Celebrating with Luther Blissett!

The Watford FC legend joined us for the opening of Luther Blissett House – and its new community hub.

We are delivering a programme of **56 new homes for social rent – the most affordable rent level. At the heart of the programme is Luther Blissett House, which includes 17 new family homes and a community hub.**

In April, we held a community day which saw residents and Watford Community Housing staff come together to spruce up the streets and take a sneak peek at the hub on Raphael Drive, which is now available for hire.

Dozens of local children took to the pop-up bouncy castle and soft play in the community hub, whilst thanks to the efforts of the 104 attendees we managed to collect more than ten bags of rubbish and fill three skips with residents' unwanted items... talk about a spring clean!

And we were thrilled to be joined by the man who is lending his name and legacy to the building itself. Naturally, Luther was to be found at the heart of things, joking with residents, assisting with the litter picking and telling us a little about what it all meant to him.

"I'm proud to be given the opportunity to put my name to this. Obviously, it's important to me because of where I grew up, and how I was raised by my parents – the social housing we lived in created a strong, caring community. I'm also really happy to see that Luther Blissett House has this dedicated community hub which will be brilliant for community events and sports clubs."

After the clean-up it was into the community hub, where everyone caught-up over coffee and cake. The hub itself was the topic of the day with a few residents describing it as a 'great space for the community' and expressing excitement at the opportunities it will present for sports clubs, community groups and local charities.

Thanks to everyone who came along to help with the clean-up – it was a fantastic show of support, and we hope that you enjoyed yourselves as much as we did!



Need a repair?

If you've got a problem that you haven't reported yet, let us know!

There are three easy ways for you to log a repair with us:

- 1) Call our Customer Services team on **0800 218 2247**
- 2) Email enquiries@wcht.org.uk
- 3) Log it using your online account – visit wcht.org.uk and sign up now



Sponsoring Herts with Pride

We are so pleased to announce that we are the main sponsors for Herts Pride 2022 – Hertfordshire's biggest LGBTQ+ festival!

At Watford Community Housing we are proud of the diverse, vibrant communities that make up Hertfordshire and can't wait to celebrate them. We will be in our exhibition area, on hand to offer advice on housing options for the LGBTQ+ community and answer any other questions our customers might have. There will also be great live performances and a Dog Show!

Herts Pride is an all-inclusive event supporting the local LGBTQ+ community, and anyone is welcome to attend – we can't wait to see you there!

20 August – 12-10pm
Cassiobury Park

Are you passionate about your community? Here's how you can make a difference...

We're a community gateway housing association, which means that residents can have more of a say over what we do. At the heart of our work is the Gateway Membership Team, which represents tenants – and they want to hear from you!

It's never been more important for social housing residents to make themselves heard. The government's social housing white paper sets out the actions it is taking to ensure that housing providers deliver safe and good-quality homes. It also highlights the need to make sure that residents are listened to by their landlords.

We're committed to putting tenants at the heart of our work and giving tenants a voice. In fact, because we are a community gateway housing association, Watford Community Housing tenants have more power to influence what we do than most social housing residents across the country.

Being a community gateway

As one of just five 'community gateway' housing associations in England, we give our tenants and other local residents more of a say in decisions we make

about homes and services.

Under the community gateway model, you can become a full member if you are a tenant or leaseholder – alternatively you can be an associate member if you live in our local communities. Members vote on key decisions at our annual general meeting (AGM) every September.

Resident involvement

We also give residents opportunities to get directly involved with our work, improving communities and delivering better services. Whatever skills you have, and whether you have plenty of time to spare or just an hour here and there, there are lots of ways you can get involved if you're passionate about your community.

For example, you could help us to review funding bids from community groups, or join one of our scrutiny panels to help improve our services.

Join the Gateway Membership Team!

If you really want to make a difference, the best option is to apply to join our Gateway Membership Team (GMT). Made up of residents from our communities, the GMT are your representatives within Watford Community Housing.

The team meets regularly, working with us to help set our priorities and influence our decisions, keeping residents at the heart of what we do. The GMT works closely with our Group Board and our senior leadership team, so they have a real say over what we do.

If you feel strongly about the services we provide and the way your home is managed, joining the GMT is a great chance to make yourself heard, and to meet like-minded people who are all determined to make sure we keep improving.

Become a Tenant Board Member

If you have appropriate experience, why not consider applying to join our Group Board?

The Group Board oversees all our decision-making and there are dedicated positions for Tenant Board Members, so that residents are represented at the highest level. These are paid positions, so it's a great opportunity to make a difference and earn at the same time.

For more information, email our Company Secretary, Bernice Ackah: bernice.ackah@wcht.org.uk



A message to you from Chris Blackett, Chair of the Gateway Membership Team:

"The Gateway Membership Team represents tenants. We work with the staff and the Group Board at Watford Community Housing to make sure every tenant has their voice heard.

"We're a group of ordinary tenants who meet regularly to discuss issues that affect residents. We're very involved at the moment with the social housing white paper, which will give all social housing tenants across the country a voice. At Watford Community Housing we feel we already have that voice, because we are a community gateway – we have more power than most tenants in the country.

"A key part of our role is scrutiny. We look at the key services that Watford

Community Housing provides, such as repairs, home improvements and estate management, so that we can highlight problems and make sure they are addressed.

"We help people with all kinds of issues. We have a Welfare Fund for people who are struggling financially and a Community Development Fund, for schemes in the wider community. We make sure these funds are used appropriately so that our tenants have everything we can help them with to make their lives better.

"This is why it's so important that you come along and join us and give us your views. We're always looking for fresh blood. If you feel social housing

is important to you, please come along. These are very difficult times and we want to make sure that we do everything we can to help tenants.

"I am really proud to be part of the GMT. I passionately believe we have made a difference over the years. We are a group of volunteers and we are passionate about what we do. If you're the sort of person who cares about their home, cares about their community and wants to make a difference, please come and join us!"



10 GREAT REASONS TO JOIN THE GATEWAY MEMBERSHIP TEAM!

- Have your say over how your home is managed
- Help decide how money for community initiatives is spent
- Give tenants a voice
- Meet like-minded and friendly people who care about the community
- Gain new skills
- Make sure that the most vulnerable people in your community get the support they need
- Influence the future of Watford Community Housing
- Boost your CV and help your career
- Get free IT equipment – and any support you need to use it
- Make a difference

Ready to make a difference?

Come to our community gateway day...

If you're interested in finding out more about joining the Gateway Membership Team, why not come along to our community gateway day?

On Saturday 2 July the GMT will be at our Leavesden Green Community Hub from 1pm until 3pm. You can pop along, meet the team in person and find out first-hand how you could make a difference. There will also be fun activities, refreshments and even a prize draw!

...or get in touch for more information or an informal chat:

Email: community@wcht.org.uk
 Visit: www.wcht.org.uk/jointhegmt
 Call: 0800 218 2247

Manage your account online!

Many of our customers have already signed up for an online account. Have you?

All you need to sign up is your tenancy number. Once you've signed up, you'll go through a short verification process before being able to access all of our services in one place! You'll be able to book a repair, pay your rent, message us directly and much more.

So, what are you waiting for?

Visit www.wcht.org.uk and click on 'Your account' to sign up now!



Let's get digital

Our digital newsletter contains all the latest news from Watford Community Housing, including what's happening in your neighbourhood, what we are doing to support you, and so much more. If you want all that sent straight to your inbox sign up by visiting www.wcht.org.uk/signup

Win £250 in shopping vouchers!

Once we have visited your home for The Big Door Knock, make sure you look out for a survey we will be sending you via text/email. To be in with a chance of winning £250 Love2Shop vouchers, all you have to do is complete the survey by Saturday 23 July – good luck!



Making Herts Greener

We've partnered with two other Hertfordshire-based housing associations to work towards our goal of greener, more sustainable homes.

As part of our ongoing commitment to sustainability, we're working in partnership with fellow Hertfordshire housing associations B3Living and settle.

As part of our Greener Herts partnership, we'll be working together on projects to make Hertfordshire's homes more sustainable. We want to play a leading role in tackling climate change and supporting the drive for net zero carbon.

Across our three housing associations, we own more than 20,000 homes – so we can make a real difference by investing in energy-efficient homes.

Our new website has just gone live – take a look to learn all about the partnership, the exciting projects we are working on, energy-saving tips and so much more!

Visit www.greenerherts.org.uk

Join our green panel!

We are looking for tenants and leaseholders who are passionate about sustainability to join our 'Green Panel' and influence the work we do to improve the sustainability of our homes. The panel will be made up of residents from across the three housing associations, giving you a say over what we do to reach our goal of net zero.

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 get involved if you are passionate about the subject or planning a career in the sustainability sector.

If this sounds like something you would be interested in, please email community@wcht.org.uk or visit www.greenerherts.org.uk for more information.

Supporting you with your money worries

If you're struggling to pay your rent, or have any other concerns around money, we're here to help.

With energy bills and other household costs on the rise, we know that the last few months have been incredibly tough. If you're having money worries, you are not alone, and we want you to know that we are here for you.

Your Money Matters

We recently partnered with Citizens Advice Watford to launch a very exciting project – Your Money Matters – which gives Watford Community Housing customers a fast-track to tailored, expert money advice. This service gives you the chance to have free, independent and confidential advice to help you stay on top of your rent and finances.

Tina Barnard, Chief Executive of Watford Community Housing, said: "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."

You can get in touch with Citizens Advice Watford by calling **0800 144 8848** or completing the form at www.wcht.org.uk/moneymatters.

Alternatively, you can contact us on **0800 218 2247** and we can make a referral for you.

StepChange

StepChange is a charity that provides free advice for people with debt problems, either online or over the phone. Visit www.stepchange.org for a full range of guides and tools to help you feel more in control of your finances – they will support you for as long as you need their help.

You can also get in touch by calling them on **0800 138 1111**.

Our Financial Inclusion team

We also have our own brilliant team of Financial Inclusion Officers on hand to give free money and benefits advice. 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 for new applicants, and making sure you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.

You can get in touch with our team by emailing TSupport@wcht.org.uk or calling **0800 218 2247**.



Have your say on Herts police

'Echo' is the Hertfordshire Constabulary's community voice and feedback platform. It allows you to tell your local police service what matters most to you, in your own words and own time.

All you need to do is click on the link to the police service for your local area, type your message and press 'submit'. Your feedback remains completely anonymous and will be used to help shape local policing initiatives, events and activity.

Visit www.herts.police.uk and search for 'echo' to find out more.

Keep yourself and others safe

The safety of our customers is our number one priority. This includes having clear guidance around fire safety in our blocks, to protect residents.

For your safety, as well as that of your neighbours, please do not leave anything in the communal areas of your block. Areas such as stairwells and hallways must be kept clear.

If you need to leave the building via the stairs in an emergency, then it is vital that you and your family can exit easily and safely. If you currently have any items kept in the communal space please remove them immediately.

Reminder!

Test your smoke alarms weekly and make sure you know your evacuation route.

If you are unable to check your smoke alarms, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue do a free home visit to make sure you are prepared in case of a fire.

Find out more by visiting www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/fire-and-rescue/

Meet the housing officer for your area!

Each of our community areas has its own housing officer, who will be out and about in your neighbourhood.

Your housing officer is dedicated to providing help in your area, including offering support with more complicated queries. You can speak to your housing officer about anything – from your rent account and tenancy to neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour.

Which area am I in?

If you're unsure about which area your home is in, or just want to find out more about who your officer is and what they can do to help, then get in touch with our Customer Service team.

You can email enquiries@wcht.org.uk or call 0800 218 2247.

A map of the community areas is shown, with each area highlighted in a different color and connected to a photo of the housing officer for that area. The areas and their officers are:

- Abbots Langley, Hemel Hempstead & Gadeside**: Jay Orr
- Woodside**: Sinead Collins
- Boundary Way, Sherwoods, Kytes & Welwyn**: Sinead Collins
- Leavesden**: Sara Povoa
- North Meriden & Garston**: Shalim Hoque
- Harebreaks**: Katie Pert
- South Meriden & Aldenham**: George Aspinall
- Central Watford, Radlett Road & Bushey**: Izzy Farrer
- West Watford & West Holywell**: Karis Lomas
- East Holywell & Oxhey**: Zeeshaan Hamid