

Summer 2023

voice

special
edition

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing



THE BIG DOOR CK

Thursday 15 June 2023:

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


watford
community
housing

Welcome to this special edition of **voice**

Voice is our quarterly magazine, packed full of the latest news from Watford Community Housing. In this issue you'll find information on important topics for residents, including what we're doing to improve your services, how to contact your housing officer, dealing with damp and mould, and how you can get support from us if you have money worries.

What is The Big Door Knock?

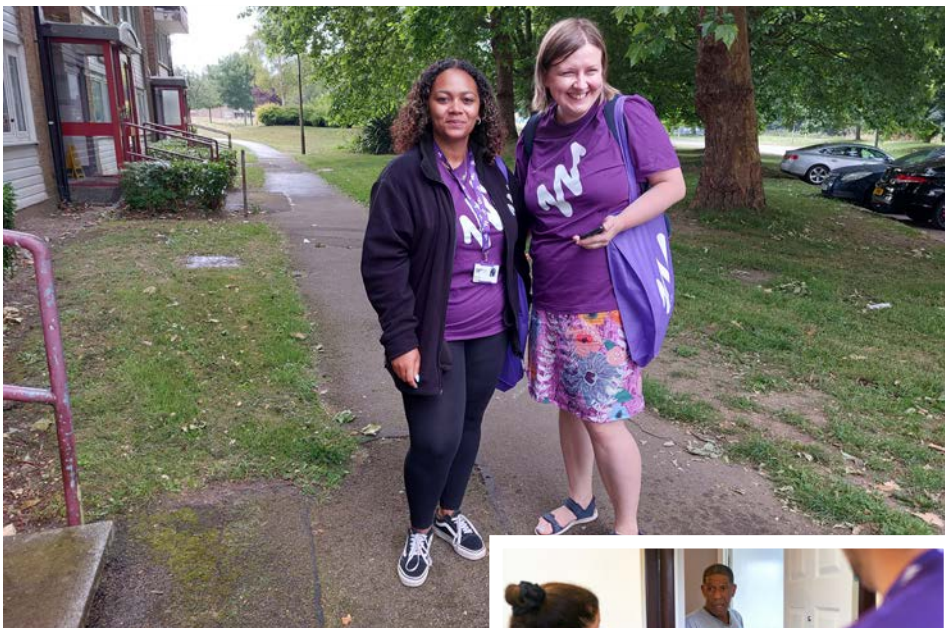
The Big Door Knock is an annual event where all our teams head out to visit residents in person. It's a chance for you to give us feedback, raise any concerns and find out more about the services we offer.

We'll be knocking on doors in all our different community areas in South-West Hertfordshire, aiming to visit all of our homes in just one day.

The first annual Big Door Knock was held following the easing of restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. It allowed us to get back out into our communities and learn how the pandemic affected our tenants and what we could do to help.

We got great feedback from residents, so we decided to do it every year! After another successful Big Door Knock in 2022, we're back again this year, knocking on doors on Thursday 15 June 2023.

Like every year, our main focus is on listening to the voices and opinions of

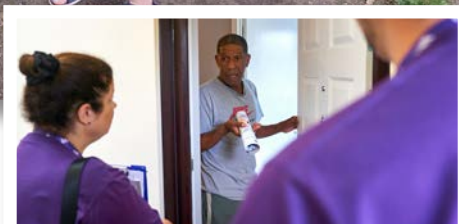


our tenants, so that we can make positive changes to our services based on your feedback.

The Big Door Knock gives you a chance to hear from us in person, but it's also the perfect opportunity for you to tell us what matters most to you.

Did we miss you?

If this magazine was posted through your letterbox because we didn't manage to catch up with you during The Big Door



Knock, we'd still love to hear from you. If there's anything you'd like to discuss with us, we can arrange a visit to your home on another day at a suitable time for you.

To arrange a visit, or to share any other feedback you have for us, please email community@wcht.org.uk

Helping you deal with damp and mould

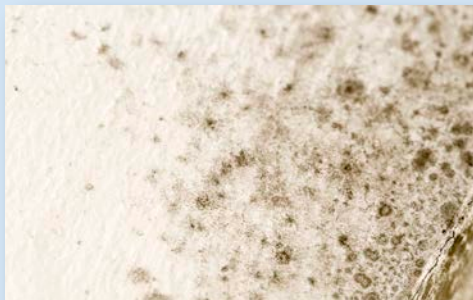
If you spot damp and mould in your home, we're here to help.

We are committed to tackling damp, mould, condensation and disrepair issues quickly and effectively. Damp and mould may lead to serious issues, so you should contact us straight away if you spot signs of these in your home.

Remember, you can contact us by calling **0800 218 2247**, emailing enquiries@wcht.org.uk, or through your online account at wcht.org.uk.

We will arrange an appointment in your home to identify the problem, carry out any improvements and book any repairs that are needed, and offer advice on how to prevent the problem happening again.

If the problem is not too severe then we may also offer you a damp and mould kit which you can use to deal with mould in your home.



For more help and advice on damp and mould, visit wcht.org.uk/mould or scan the QR code.

Residents celebrate King's coronation

Our tenant groups were given funding to host parties in honour of His Majesty's big day!

Communities across the nation came together to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III, including many of our resident groups.

Our Gateway Membership Team, which is made up of tenants, generously gave each of our tenant and residents' associations an extra £300 funding to hold an event in honour of the coronation. Here are the highlights from just a few of the events...

- A committee member of the Leavesden Community Group made an unbelievable crown-shaped cake for Sherwoods' coronation party!
- On Tuesday 9 May our Nifty (over) Fifty group had their coronation

afternoon tea party at Horwood Court. They had a tombola, a book sale, a lovely buffet and a cake competition – congratulations to Nina who won a £10 M&S voucher!

- The Meriden Residents' Association (MRA) held their 'Coronation Coffee Morning' on 10 May. One of the attendees was Mr S, a former chair of the MRA who has, amazingly, lived through three coronations! He was proudly talking about his experiences with our staff and showing them his memorabilia from King George's coronation in 1937, including a blue book given to all schoolchildren and a programme given out at the North Watford Odeon.



Are you facing money worries?

Are you struggling to pay your bills? Or do you have any other concerns about money? Please know that you are not alone – we are here to help.

In 2020 we set up a Welfare Fund to support customers who were affected financially by the coronavirus pandemic. More recently, this fund has been used to support tenants who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

Our Gateway Membership Team understand the struggle some tenants are facing at the moment, and made the decision to increase our fund to £260,000. This means we have the capacity to support many more vulnerable tenants in need of help with living costs.

This is a discretionary grant and is used to help ease financial pressures for one or more of the following reasons:

- Urgent welfare or living expenses, such as emergency food or utility costs
- Essential domestic goods, such as white goods, beds or crockery
- Emergency or unforeseen expenses, such as funeral costs or security measures
- Health and safety in the home or serious hygiene matters, such as help with hoarding

If you, or someone you know, may need help from this fund, please get in touch. You can email community@wcht.org.uk or call us on 0800 218 2247.



We've secured funding to help cut tenants' energy bills

Through our Greener Herts partnership, we'll be making homes more energy-efficient and saving residents money.

Scan the QR code to find out more or visit greenerherts.org.uk:

Our Greener Herts partnership has made a successful bid to the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), which will enable us to make millions of pounds-worth of energy efficiency improvements to tenants' homes.

This funding reflects a combined pledge of £25 million from Watford Community Housing, Dacorum Borough Council and fellow Hertfordshire housing associations B3Living and settle - with an additional £14 million provided by the government.

Over 1,500 social housing properties will benefit from this funding. At Watford Community Housing our main focus will be improving the energy efficiency of our homes through wall insulation.

The funding will help us improve homes and reduce energy bills for social housing residents across Hertfordshire. These works will take place over the next couple of years, targeting the least energy-efficient homes first.

If your home is due to receive improvements then we will get in touch with you to provide more information, so there's no need to contact us.



How do I contact my housing officer?

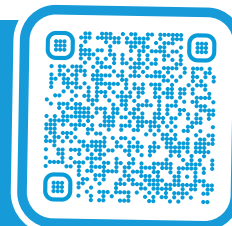
Each of our community areas has their own dedicated housing officer who will be out and about in your neighbourhood.

Our housing officers are on hand to offer their support with anything you need - from your rent account and tenancy to neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour. If you have any questions or queries, don't hesitate to contact your local housing officer.

Find your housing officer's details

You can check who your housing officer is at www.wcht.org.uk/housingofficer.

If you're unsure about which area your home is in, or just want to find out more about your officer and what they can do to help, then get in touch with our Housing team by emailing housing@wcht.org.uk



Scan the QR code to find out who your housing officer is.



Cooking course back for seconds!

We've been working with our partners to help residents cook healthy meals on a budget – and it proved so popular we had to lay on extra helpings.

We were recently part of a great new project that aimed to help families cook healthy meals on a budget.

Together with local partners – Watford Borough Council, Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust, Random Café, Meriden Residents' Association and Beezee Bodies – we hosted three free sessions with a qualified nutritionist supporting attendees to cook delicious slow cooker recipes, including a tasty vegetarian chilli. Each family who attended the workshop was also given a free slow cooker!

We had such a great turnout and lovely feedback, with multiple families saying they were very likely to prepare more home-cooked meals following the course. Following the overwhelming success of these sessions, we decided to run the course all over again!

This time, taking our customers' feedback on board, we had an extra session

including one in the evening at Random Café! Across the four sessions we had around 40 attendees, who found the sessions really useful. "My kids really enjoyed the cooking session; it created a sense of awareness about their food," said one. Another attendee commented: "The environment and atmosphere was very good, and it was very inclusive."

Edel Maher, our Community and Customer Engagement Manager, said: "We're thrilled to be working with our local partners to host these great free sessions for families in the Meriden area. We're committed to providing a wide range of support to residents in our communities, and this project is helping families learn how to cook healthy meals that are affordable."

"We know that rising living costs are affecting everyone, so these events are an excellent opportunity to find out more about maintaining a balanced diet, even if you are on a tight budget."

Have you signed up for an online account?

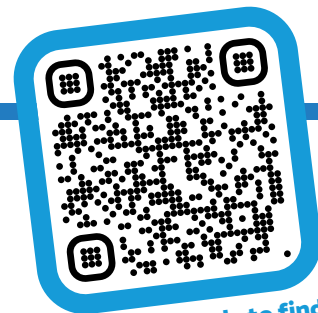
Many of our tenants have signed up for an online account. Here is why you should too...

- You can book a repair and message us directly – it's the fastest way to contact us!
- Pay your rent and check your rent balance – rest assured that your rent account is up to date on your online account.
- It's free and easy to sign up - all you need is your tenancy number!

So, what are you waiting for?

Scan the QR code to sign up for an online account now:





Scan the QR code to find out more about our new approach to collecting customer feedback.

Our commitment to improving services

Our aim has always been to provide first-class services for our customers. Here are some of the steps we're taking to ensure we keep on improving.



In 2020 the government published the **Social Housing White Paper**, which set out how landlords across England could improve services for people living in social housing and ensure that tenants are listened to. This led to the creation of **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)** which are designed to assess how well landlords are performing.

As of April 2023 all social housing providers are now legally required to report performance data to the Regulator of Social Housing on an annual basis, and to provide tenants with greater transparency about their performance.

We previously sent you short surveys via Feefo to collect your feedback, including after a repair or moving into one of our homes. We are pleased to say we are now using a system called CX Feedback that has been made specifically for social

landlords like us, and gives us greater options on how and when we survey customers. For more information on CX Feedback, scan the QR code above or visit wcht.org.uk/CXFeedback.

On June 16 we will be sending out our next TSM survey using CX feedback. Your answers will be anonymous, so please do give us your honest views. We will be publishing the results of our TSM surveys on our website, as well as sharing news stories on the improvements we make as a result of your feedback.

Last year we conducted some initial surveys to find out how you thought we were doing. 542 people took part and gave us really helpful insights into where we need to make improvements to our services. After sharing the results with our Gateway Membership Team, we learnt that there were three key areas for us

to concentrate on: our repairs service, tackling anti-social behaviour, and complaint handling/feedback.

By listening to you and taking on board your concerns, we are pleased to say we have already made improvements to these three areas.

Our repairs service

Our repairs service is one of the most important services that we provide and we're aware that it hasn't always been meeting the high standard we expect. This year we have implemented a wide variety of improvements that give customers more transparency, better communication, and a better overall experience from our repairs service.

We now regularly update our website with guidance on the average waiting times for different types of repairs. We always aim to carry out repairs as quickly as possible but how long it takes will depend on the type of repair, how much demand there is for that type of job, the time of year, available materials, and other factors. For more information or to see our current waiting times, visit wcht.org.uk/repairs.

We have appointed new contractors to help us with the backlog of special repairs following the Covid-19 pandemic, such as roofing and guttering, and now send more regular messages to keep you updated on the status of your repair.

Contractors who do repair works on our behalf have a new calling card and can now leave you with their details if you need follow-up works or have any questions.

With CX Feedback, you can also now send photos with your survey responses – so if something is not right with your repair, you can tell us much more easily by attaching a photo directly from your phone.

Anti-social behaviour

We received a lot of feedback about taking firm action on anti-social behaviour. Here are just a few of the improvements we have made to help you feel safer in your neighbourhood.

We have launched a new app that provides a simple way to ensure noise complaints are reported safely and securely! The Noise App allows you to record and send any kind of noise nuisance directly to your housing officer. It is completely free – simply download the app, set up an account and start recording.

We can use this information to determine whether the noise counts as anti-social behaviour – for example, neighbours blasting music at 3am – and forward it on to Environmental Health. If it is simply a difference in lifestyle – such as children playing loudly in the garden at 2pm – we will provide support to resolve the issue amicably. For more information on the

Noise App visit wcht.org.uk/NoiseApp or scan the QR code below.

We have been working closely with our Estates Team to address fly-tipping issues and have been



Scan the QR code to read more about the Noise App.

able to issue multiple people with fixed penalty fines.

Brilliant partnership working with the police and Watford Borough Council meant we were able to obtain a closure order for a property which was causing lots of anti-social behaviour and was having a negative impact on the community. We are grateful to all the neighbours who worked with us to tackle the issues and helped to make their neighbourhood a safer, more comfortable place to live.

Contacting and giving us feedback

You told us that we needed to improve the experience you receive when you contact us or give us feedback.

We recognise the need to make sure that, where possible, we resolve customers' issues on their first call. Our contact centre staff will be undergoing additional training around common call topics such as direct debits, tenancy agreements, fire safety, diagnosing repairs, and using our website to manage your tenancy.

In February 2023 the Gateway Membership Team (GMT) – who represent our tenants – selected and led a customer scrutiny session on our out-of-hours service. Feedback from this session led us to retender for this service and, with the help of our customers, we have appointed Lemon to take over as our new out-of-

hours provider from May 2023.

We've made changes to our customer services phonenumber queuing system to make it more streamlined for customers, including reducing the number of queue options, introducing a callback function and adding new hold music.

Do you know how to make a complaint?

If you are unsatisfied with a service that we have provided, please let us know so we can improve.

There are multiple ways for you to raise a complaint:

- through your online account
- by emailing feedback@wcht.org.uk
- by calling **0800 218 2247**
- or by speaking to a member of staff in person

If you would like your feedback to be given anonymously, you do not need to leave any contact details. We will still log your feedback and investigate any complaints, but please note that we will not be able to respond or provide any updates via our complaints process.

If at any stage of the complaints process you are not happy with the way it is being handled, you can raise it with the Housing Ombudsman by going to their website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

Are you a shared ownership customer or a leaseholder?

We understand that being a shared ownership customer or a leaseholder means that you have a different relationship with us as a landlord.

We now have more than 600 shared owners and leaseholders, some of whom have been with us since before the stock transfer from Watford Borough Council to Watford Community Housing 15 years ago.

We want to ensure that we are listening to the needs of shared ownership customers and leaseholders, so we'll be holding two online sessions in September, ahead of our AGM.

They will be on:

- Monday 18 September 6-8pm – shared ownership
- Tuesday 19 September 6-8pm – leaseholders

You will receive an invitation to these online events by email, so keep an eye on your inbox.

We will be discussing upcoming major works, service charges and defect management – but we want to make sure we are covering the topics that matter to you, so please get in touch to let us know if there's something else you'd like to raise.

Do you have something you'd like to discuss?

Please email your suggestion to community@wcht.org.uk





Making progress at the Meriden

We continue to make good progress with the Meriden regeneration, with the shopping parade now opened and work on the homes at Kingfisher Way and The Turnstones nearing completion.

Following the completion of two more bungalows on York Way last September, the final remaining bungalow is due to be finished this summer.

Coming soon – great new homes for older people!

Works are also continuing on Robin House, the new independent living building which will offer a dedicated living space for older people. Once complete, this collection of 51 one-bedroom apartments will be home to people aged over 55.

Independent living homes offer residents the chance to live within a safe community. Housing-related support and care services can be provided on site, and the services can be adapted to suit residents' changing needs, helping them remain independent.

The new high-quality, modern homes will be complemented by other on-site facilities, including a bio-diverse garden space.

If you would like to find out more about living in our great new flexicare homes, please email enquiries@wcht.org.uk or call 0800 218 2247.



Our new joint venture providing affordable homes

We've joined forces with Hertsmere Borough Council to launch Hertsmere Living, a new company providing affordable homes for the local area.



Hertsmere Living, our new joint venture with Hertsmere Borough Council, has just announced the completion of its first development of affordable homes!

The new company aims to help address the housing affordability crisis by ensuring homes go to those most in need.

By working together, we will be able to access additional sources of funding for new homes and make more effective use of land, helping to address the need for high-quality affordable homes. The day-to-day management of homes delivered through the joint venture will be overseen by Watford Community Housing.

We recently marked the completion of Hertsmere Living's first development, Fairfield Close in Radlett, which consists of 3 one-bedroom and 4 two-bedroom flats for social rent.

Speaking on the new joint venture, Tina Barnard, Watford Community Housing's Chief Executive said: "We're delighted to be announcing this joint venture alongside the completion of such a fantastic set of social rent homes at Fairfield Close.

"We have a strong track record of delivering through partnerships such as this with key local authorities, because they provide real benefit to the community and enable us to accomplish more. We're looking forward to a long and prosperous working relationship with the council."

Sajida Bijle, Managing Director of Hertsmere Borough Council, said: "We're pleased to have set up the new joint venture company and delighted to welcome tenants to their new home. It's a new start for both of us!"

Random Café's grand opening

Random Café celebrated the opening of its new permanent building on the Meriden recently.



Scan the QR code to find out more about Random Cafe.

Random Café, a local community group which has been based in Meriden Gardens for the last two-and-a-half years, recently welcomed supporters, funders and local dignitaries to the opening of its new Community Café.

Having run their café from the portacabin on the site since November 2021, they have been fundraising to build a larger café – and with construction of the café now complete, it was time to celebrate!

We have been a key supporter of Random Café since its inception and we're delighted that this new café has come to fruition. It is wholly deserved and the team does fantastic work on behalf of the local community.

Random Café founder and director Jane Johnson said: "We are delighted to

have welcomed over 30 of our biggest supporters and funders to our gala opening. Our new café will allow us to serve more customers and to host a wider range of events on the site.

"The new café is better placed within our gardens rather than in the car park of our site and we hope that with the summer approaching, customers will be able to enjoy the delights of our gardens while they sample the delicious food and drink from our café."

Random Café is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays between 10am and 2pm, and is located at 24a Garsmouth Way, Watford, WD25 9DR.

For more information visit randomcafewatford.com or scan the QR code above.

How we use your data

When we visit you on your doorstep during The Big Door Knock, we will be asking you if the information we have for you is correct – this is to make sure our records are up to date, and we can contact you if we need to.

If we don't manage to speak to you on the day and you need to update your details, please get in touch on **0800 218 2247** or email enquiries@wcht.org.uk.

To find out how we handle your personal data, please read our 'Your Privacy Matters' booklet on our website at wcht.org.uk/privacy.



Scan the QR code to read the 'Your Privacy Matters' booklet.

Could you help us improve services for tenants?

We're always looking for tenants who want to get involved in the work we do, share their views and help us to improve our services. Read on to find out more.



Do you have ideas about how we could improve our services for tenants? If so, we want to hear them! If you think you could help to make a difference, there are lots of ways you can get involved in our work - from becoming a Watford Community Housing member so you can vote on key issues, to representing tenants as part of the Gateway Membership Team or our Group Board.

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.

Under the community gateway model, you can become a full member if you are a tenant, leaseholder or shared owner - alternatively you can be an associate member if you live in our local communities. Members can vote to influence key decisions and attend our annual general meeting (AGM) in September.

Membership also enables you to:

- stand for the Gateway Membership Team
- elect other tenants/leaseholders to the Gateway Membership Team
- apply to be a Group Board Member
- attend member events and meetings

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, including changes to our policies and services.

You don't need any particular skills or qualifications to join the GMT. We'll provide any support and guidance you

**As a community gateway housing association,
we put people at the heart of our work.**

To find out more about membership and getting involved, visit: www.wcht.org.uk/your-gateway

need, as well as paying your expenses, providing IT equipment, and covering the cost for you to attend training and conferences. It's a great way to pick up new skills and experience, which could improve your CV and help your career.

Ready to find out more?

If you're passionate about your community and want to find out about getting involved with the Gateway Membership Team, please get in touch. Even if you're not sure, we want to hear from you. We'll be happy to have an informal chat and talk it through with you.

Email us – community@wcht.org.uk – or call **0800 218 2247**.

Go to wcht.org.uk/jointhegmt or scan the QR code opposite to find out more.

Other ways to get involved

There are a range of ways to get directly involved with our work, improving communities and helping us deliver better services. Whatever skills you have, and whether you have plenty of time to spare or just an hour here and there, we'll help you find something suitable so you can make your voice heard in a way that suits you.

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. Get in touch to find out more!

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

Preparing for the AGM

This year's annual general meeting will take place on Monday 25 September, at our Gateway House offices. To get involved and have your say, there's still time to sign up and become a member!

To join or vote at the AGM this year, you've got until the end of June to get in touch and let us know you'd like to become a member. All you need to do is fill out the form at www.wcht.org.uk/membership – or you can email us at community@wcht.org.uk.

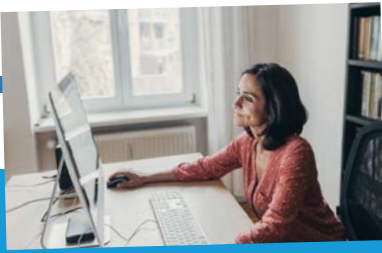
Already a member?

If you're a Watford Community Housing member, we will contact you in September with everything you need to cast your votes and to join the meeting if you want to. If we have an email address for you, we'll send you a link to your information pack by email – so keep an eye on your inbox!

If we don't have an email address for you, you'll receive your pack by post. However, we'd prefer to send your pack by email, so we can spend less on postage and more on improving your services! If you haven't given us your email address yet, please get in touch to update your details – you can email enquiries@wcht.org.uk or call us on **0800 218 2247**.

Scan to find out more
about membership.





Ever thought of a career in housing?

We are funding housing qualifications for tenants, giving people a chance to build a career.

As a community gateway organisation, we provide many opportunities for our customers to be involved. This year we will be paying for two of our residents to undertake a fully funded Chartered Institute of Housing Level 2 qualification.

Level two qualifications are for those who are new to the housing sector, or who wish to pursue a career in the housing sector. They are designed to provide you with an introduction to the subject, so they're suitable for residents.

It's a four-week online course and you'll get to choose one of these units, to learn more about the area that interests you most:

- Housing provision and housing organisations
- Customer service for housing
- Assets, repair and maintenance
- Professional development in housing

If you are interested in finding out about this amazing opportunity, email community@wcht.org.uk.

We're always looking for local talent and, as a Watford Community Housing tenant, you know the standard of services you expect to receive. Join our team and help us make positive improvements to our services. Scan the QR code above or visit www.wcht.org.uk/vacancies to check out our current vacancies.



Scan the QR code to find out more.

Find a home that's right for you

Why pay for more than you need? Our team can help you move to a more suitable home and save money.

Is your property too big and no longer suited to your needs? Are your living costs causing a strain? It's time to find a home that is right for you - and we're here to help.

If your circumstances change and you find yourself living in a property that costs too much or is too large for you to manage, then we will help you to find something more appropriate. As well as support, you may be eligible for a cash incentive if you are looking to move somewhere smaller!

Once you are on your local authority's housing register, you can bid for advertised properties that you would be interested in. You can also do a mutual exchange - where you swap your property with someone else who is also looking to move. This can be from anywhere across the country!

If you are looking to move to a smaller home, you may be eligible for a cash

incentive of up to £2,200 for making your home available for a larger family.

This summer we will be holding sessions at our community hubs, so feel free to pop along and speak to our team about your options.

Leavesden Green Community Hub:

- 15 August - 1:30pm to 3pm and 5pm to 7pm

Luther Blissett Community Hub:

- 17 August - 1:30pm to 3pm and 5pm to 7pm

Get in touch

To discuss your situation or ask us any questions you have, call us on **0800 218 2247** or email enquiries@wcht.org.uk. We want to work with you to ensure a smooth process and we pride ourselves on offering practical support and advice to help you get the most out of your home.

Contact us

www.wcht.org.uk

T: 0800 218 2247

E: enquiries@wcht.org.uk