

Winter 2018/19

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

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- Tips for keeping your home safe
- Gas safety – we're here to help!
- Tenant Question Time



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Top tips to keep your home safe!

The dark autumn and winter months mean that burglaries can happen more often at this time of year. To help you stay safe, Hertfordshire Constabulary have put together some of their tried and tested 'top tips' on how to secure your property and keep burglars away.

- Ensure doors are double-locked at all times and keep your windows closed and locked.
- Keep keys and valuables secure and out of sight.
- Give your home a 'lived-in' look by installing some outside lighting or using timer switches to control inside lights, radios and televisions.
- If you can, consider installing a doorbell camera, internal camera and/or a monitored burglar alarm.
- Make sure your fences are secure and your side gates are locked. You should also keep tools and ladders in a locked shed.

If you'd like more advice, you can check out the Herts Constabulary website - www.herts.police.uk - or visit www.owlprotect.uk for information and discounted security gadgets.

Remember that in an emergency you should call 999.



Giving single parents the gift of time

We've been helping to support single parents and their children through a new group.

As part of our commitment to supporting diversity and inclusivity in our communities, we recently set up a friendship and support group for single parents in Watford. By bringing together parents who may feel isolated to share thoughts, ideas and advice, we want to create a place that makes single parents feel part of an even bigger family.

Since being set up in September, Single Parents Watford has already held two events, based on ideas from parents who attended the group's early meetings. During the October half term, the group took over 130 parents and children to Jump In! in Borehamwood. Whilst the kids bounced off the walls and slid down the sheer-drop slides, parents enjoyed free refreshments in the café - unless they fancied jumping in too!

The whole event, including travel and snacks, was totally free - allowing parents to have fun, stress-free quality time with their children without worrying about affordability. This was one of the key issues the group wanted to address.



Parents and children enjoying Jump In!

The morning was a real hit! The feedback showed that parents really appreciated the existence of the group.

One moving comment from a parent said: "Thank you so much for today - my child had a great time. I'm so glad I found this group. I don't drive, money is often limited and I don't have family members around, so this activity meant a lot to us both."

At the next meeting, parents began planning another event - a Christmas party held at the Meriden Community Centre. The day included face painting, party games and mince pies, as well as a lunch for the children and Christmas crafts. The event was entirely set up and run by staff volunteers and members of the Single Parents group, and all agreed it kicked an expensive month off with a fantastic, free, festive event!

If you'd like to get involved with **Single Parents Watford**, search for the group on **Facebook** or call the Community Engagement team on **01923 209183**.



Father Christmas was a big hit!

Gas safety – we’re here to help!

Every year we service gas appliances such as boilers to make sure they are safe and working well. Here’s everything you need to know.

As part of our work to make sure your home is safe, we ask that you let us in to service your boiler once a year, so that it continues working correctly and efficiently. Carrying out a gas service is one of our legal requirements as your landlord, so we try to make the process as easy as we can for you!

Why do I need to have a gas service safety check?

It keeps you safe: while gas leaks are rare, regular maintenance helps to prevent any incidents and keeps your home and family safe.

It reduces your bill: regular servicing is a great way of ensuring that your boiler uses energy in the most efficient way, which means keeping your energy costs down!

It extends the boiler’s life: an annual gas boiler service will ensure that you can keep using your boiler for the longest possible time.

What happens during the visit?

At some point during the year, we’ll call you to arrange for one of our engineers to come and carry out the gas service. The

safety check covers the appliances that we own, like your boiler. If you own other gas appliances, like a gas cooker, we will do a visual check but any further servicing is up to you to arrange.

The visit usually takes about 90 minutes. During the visit, our engineers will:

- carry out a visual check of your appliances, flue and your gas pipe work
- further check and test the flue – our engineer might need to pop up to your loft space if that’s where your flue is
- ensure that your air vent is working correctly
- replace any necessary parts
- test your property for any gas leaks and check your smoke alarms are working correctly

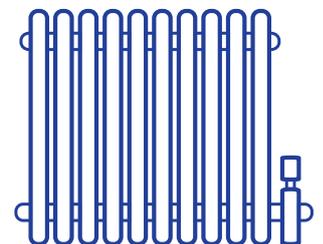
The engineer will then ask you to sign a gas safety certificate. This document lists all the gas appliances in your house and lets you know they’re in safe working order. We’ll send you a copy of the certificate through the post within 28 days of your service.

What happens if I miss my appointment?

75% of our tenants let us in on their first appointment, which is great! As a thank you, we enter everyone who lets us in first time into a prize draw to win £25 of gift vouchers.

If you miss an appointment, we’ll call you to arrange another at a time that’s right for you. If you miss three appointments, we’re obliged by law to ask the court for a warrant to access your home and carry out the safety check. Any costs that this incurs will be recharged to you.

As well as putting you at risk, missed appointments cost us money and put pressure on our resources. We want to be able to deliver the best possible services for you, so next time we call you for a gas appointment, please remember that we’re here to help.



Fire safety update

We’ve been working hard to make our fire safety and prevention services even better for you. Here’s our latest updates!

Good news about doormats!

Fire safety specialists that we’ve spoken to have informed us that doormats in communal areas are no longer considered a fire hazard. We know that some of you like to have a doormat outside your apartment door, and after this news we’re going to allow you to leave them in place.



However, please be aware that doormats are still a trip hazard. You may want to factor this in when considering the type of doormat you own and whether to put it outside in the corridor.

Communal areas – keep them safe!

It’s important to remember that communal areas should be kept clear in order to avoid creating a fire hazard. For this reason, we don’t allow you to store flammable materials anywhere in communal or landing areas. That means items like patio heaters, barbecues, paints, portable generators and petrol cans must be kept elsewhere to avoid fires.

For safety reasons, we ask you not to store anything in the gas/electric cupboard. We’ll still be keeping an eye out for other items in corridors or communal areas and will dispose of anything we find. For example, please don’t leave items like mobility scooters, wheelchairs or prams in the corridor.

Also, please don’t decorate outside your flat. Things like festive decorations, pictures and plants are hazards and will be removed if they’re found in a communal area. Anything except doormats should be kept inside your home – please help us keep your block free from fire hazards!

Tenant Question Time – understanding your tenancy



Our latest tenant question time event was all about helping you to understand your tenancy. The Gateway Membership Team realised there were a number of key areas which residents had questions on, including adding people to your tenancy, transferring your tenancy in the event of a death and Right to Buy.

The event gave tenants the chance to put these questions to our panel of staff experts. Here are the answers to a couple of the key questions asked on the night:

Q. Does the rent cost increase when another person is added to the tenancy?

A. This depends on whether you are on a social, affordable or market rent tenancy. If you make a change to an affordable tenancy, this can happen. This is part of

housing law and isn't something that we can control. If you would like to check your tenancy type please contact our Neighbourhoods team on **01923 209227**.

Q. What do I need to do if someone else is going to live with me in my property?

A. To change a sole tenancy (one person) into a joint tenancy, the tenancy needs to be clear of rent arrears. Once that person is added you get a new tenancy. A tenancy audit would need to be carried out and the person being added would need to provide ID to your Neighbourhood Officer.

Another option is to add a person to the property, instead of adding them to the tenancy. In order to add people as living at the property, ID would need to be provided.

To read a full report on the event, please visit our website – wcht.org.uk – and search for 'tenant question time'.

The next Tenant Question Time events are due to take place on 23rd January and 6th March 2019 – keep your eyes peeled for more information!

The Gateway Membership Team wants to know which subjects matter most to you, so if you have any burning questions you'd like answers for, get in touch on gmt@wcht.org.uk.

Beat the chill – protect your pipes!

The winter weather has come around again, which means cold nights and cold mornings too! It's important to remember that your water pipes will be getting just as chilly as you, so keeping them protected from the cold will ensure your water keeps flowing throughout the season.

Last year, lots of pipes froze or burst in the low temperatures, so to prevent this happening again, Affinity Water have shared their best pipe-protecting advice. One of the best ways to keep your pipes working well this winter is to insulate them. If you have pipes in your loft, you can cover them in felt, pipe wrap or any other insulating material. For your outside pipes, you can cover them with a waterproof material. You can also insulate your cold water tank (if you have one) and any outside taps.

Dates for your diary

Cleaning and grounds maintenance contract update meetings
59 Clarendon Road
Thursday 3rd January and Wednesday 6th February

'New Year, New Me!' launch event
59 Clarendon Road
Tuesday 15th January

Tenant Question Time -
59 Clarendon Road
Wednesday 23rd January

Build your confidence course
Leavesden Green Community Hub
Thursday 24th January

LGBT history talk
59 Clarendon Road
Monday 18th February

Contact Us

Please get in touch to find out more about any of these events!

T: 0800 218 2247

E: enquiries@wcht.org.uk

www.wcht.org.uk