

Winter 2019/2020

voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

- Investing in your safety
- Funding community projects
- Making music at Horwood Court
- Keep your home secure this winter
- Save money on your heating
- And more!



watford
community
housing

Investing in your safety

Nothing is more important to us than your safety and wellbeing. To give our customers added peace of mind, we have invested more than £2 million upgrading fire safety measures in our blocks over the last year. Here's what we've done.

We are committed to making all of our customers' homes as safe as possible. Over the last 12 months, we've carried out a major programme of improvements in our blocks of flats to make sure that they go well beyond the minimum fire safety standards.

We have spent around half a million pounds to install new multi-sensor fire alarms in blocks of flats that are two or three storeys high, including our independent living homes for older people. These detectors use the latest technology to give you the best protection. They have two different sensors, so they can detect either smoke or a rapid increase in heat – and sound the alarm as quickly as possible.

The alarms are wirelessly interconnected between each flat, so that everyone can be alerted quickly if there is a fire somewhere in the block. They also allow us to monitor the status of the alarm remotely, meaning we can make checks to keep people safe without having to access properties or disturb residents.

On top of this, we have invested £1.5 million on new safety measures for our two high-rise blocks on the Meriden in Garston – Abbey View and Munden View. The local landmarks have undergone extensive safety updates that go far beyond the regulated standard. As well as the multi-sensor alarms

fitted in our other blocks, these include installing sprinklers in every property.

Although the existing fire safety systems were already compliant with all the relevant fire and building regulations, we decided to invest in further safety features to make these buildings even safer, keeping the wellbeing of customers at the forefront of our work.

The current legal standard outlines how each flat should have a fire alarm and effective compartmentation. With the new smoke detection systems and sprinklers, we have now gone one step further than the regulations demand, as we want residents to be confident in their safety and feel secure in their homes.

Working together

Before we started these works, we directly consulted residents of Abbey View and Munden View over the addition of the sprinkler systems, making sure that people had the chance to have their say.

We then worked in close partnership with the local fire services on these upgrades – they were able to assist in designing the most effective sprinkler system for the building in an emergency. The fire service also provided support to keep residents involved in the improvements, holding community events and training exercises to



help people understand and be confident in their safety procedures.

Jim Moran, Station Commander at Watford Fire station, said: "Obviously we are very pleased sprinklers have been installed at Abbey and Munden. These sprinklers are a very effective way of suppressing a fire and retaining it to its room of origin. Sometimes residents are concerned about the possible disruption these installations may cause, but the installation was carried out very efficiently at these blocks.

"We have made a number of visits to these buildings and so far have taken part in two simulation training exercises to familiarise and test procedures with the teams from Garston, Watford, Borehamwood and Kings Langley fire stations. This has been greatly successful, with residents being understanding and supportive throughout."

The entire installation took six months, with work beginning in February 2019 and the final system being installed in August. The subtle, fully integrated system put in place means every single room in each home is protected.

Ben Johnson, Director of Operations at Watford Community Housing said: "Keeping people safe is our top priority. We took the decision to invest in additional fire safety features in our blocks because we want to go above and beyond the minimum regulations.

"We're really grateful to all of our customers for working with us so that we could install these new features – and we hope it gives them the reassurance to feel safe and comfortable in their homes."



On the bench!

Our Community Chest fund can help to make people's ideas for their neighbourhood a reality. At Eastbury and Longcroft, residents have been making better use of their outdoor space after their application was successful.



Customers at Eastbury and Longcroft celebrated in style after their Community Chest application was granted!

To bring the community together, residents had the wonderful idea to create a social spot where they could meet up on nice evenings, to have a chat with a glass of wine or a cosy cup of tea.

As this was an idea that could serve the community, our Independent Living team assisted them in completing a Community Chest application for funding which would pay for some benches that could sit in the Longcroft grounds and become the centre of their social spot!

The application was approved and the residents couldn't wait to make use of the new benches! A group of 13 residents

attended a celebratory wine and cheese afternoon to get settled into their new relaxation spot – and they couldn't have been happier with the outcome.

The group absolutely love their new seats and we can't wait to see more of their events and fellow residents making the most of these new additions to the community!

Funding for your projects

If you could use some help in funding an event, initiative or project that serves to improve your community or local environment, we might be able to provide you with the money to make it happen.

To find out more about applying for Community Chest funding call the Community Engagement team on 01923 209183 or email community@wcht.org.uk.



Never miss an issue!

Voice brings you all the latest news, information, advice and money-saving tips from Watford Community Housing.

To make sure you never miss an issue, let us know that you'd like to receive a regular copy by post. Call 0800 218 2247 or email communications@wcht.org.uk.

You can also get monthly updates from Watford Community Housing via our digital newsletter! To stay in the loop, head to www.wcht.org.uk to subscribe!

Congratulations!

Well done to Mr Barton, who was the lucky winner of our online account competition!

He won £50-worth of shopping vouchers for being one of the people who signed up for an online account at www.wcht.org.uk in November.

Debbie, our Customer Experience Manager, had the pleasure of handing Mr Barton his grand prize, just in time for him to do a spot of Christmas shopping!



Keeping your home secure



It's no secret that there are more burglaries in the darker winter months than during the summer.

Hertfordshire Constabulary has put together a list of tips to keep your home safe and to help keep burglars at bay.

- Use timer switches on a lamp, radio or TV set so that they turn on as it gets dark in the afternoons.
- Make a habit of checking that ground floor windows and doors are closed and locked when you leave the house or go to bed. Upstairs windows should be locked when the house is unoccupied.
- PVCu doors usually have multi-locking systems – lock them by lifting the handle and turning the key to keep your home secure.
- Car and house keys should be kept out of sight in a safe place. Don't leave them on display on window sills, in porches, hallways or kitchens.
- Secure your rear garden by shutting and locking any gates. Burglars can use garden tools, like ladders to break in, so make sure you securely lock away any tools after use.

For more advice and tips, check out the Herts Constabulary website at www.herts.police.uk

And remember that in an emergency you should call 999!

Who you gonna call?

Don't know your Watford Borough Council from your Watford Community Housing? Here's a handy guide to a range of common concerns.

If you have a question about your home, your community or your tenancy, our Customer Services team pretty much know it all, but sometimes we get one or two calls about other subjects that need to be directed somewhere else.

Aside from questions about your energy and water supplies, your local council and your county council, we will be able to point you in the right direction for the majority of questions that we can't answer for you.

Take a look at the list below and find out who to contact, should you need help!

I have a pest infestation or I would like some bulky items of furniture collected. Who do I speak to?

These are jobs for your local council.

You can call or check online to see if your local council provides pest control services here: www.gov.uk/report-pest-problem

And here you can apply for the collection of large waste items: www.gov.uk/collection-large-waste-items

I have a query about benefits or council tax.

Calls regarding council tax and housing benefit would be handled by your local council. You should contact the Department for Work and Pensions regarding other benefit queries.

My bins have not been collected.

Your local council will be able to look into this. You can call them to find out more, or you can enter your postcode here – www.gov.uk/missed-bin-collection – and report it online!

I would like to know how to register for housing/Home Connections.

You can call your local council or visit www.gov.uk/apply-for-council-housing and follow the steps to register online!

I would like to speak to someone about a bus pass.

Your local council will be able to issue you with a bus pass if you qualify, or you can apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass.

I want to apply for a dropped kerb/I have a query about the roads or pavements.

Your roads and pavements are managed by Hertfordshire County Council. You can call them on **0300 123 4047**.

You can apply for a dropped kerb online at www.gov.uk/apply-dropped-kerb.

I would like to speak to Youth Connexions.

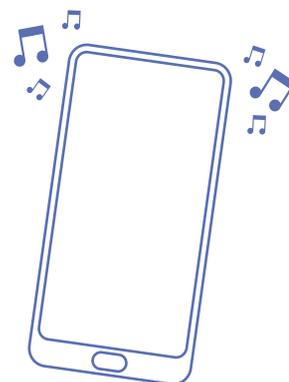
Youth Connexions Hertfordshire is run by Hertfordshire County Council. You can get in touch with them on **0300 123 7538** or online at www.ychertfordshire.org.

My electricity is not working but I have money on the meter.

If you are having problems with your electricity, please contact your energy supplier directly.

I want to query my water bill.

If you have queries about your water bill, please contact Affinity Water on **0345 357 2401** (for metered accounts) or **0345 357 2402** (for non-metered accounts).



Singers of all ages make music at Horwood Court

Residents of Horwood Court were joined by schoolchildren from Knutsford Primary Academy for a good old-fashioned sing-along!

Throughout October, our popular intergenerational music sessions returned to Horwood Court for four wonderful sessions that gave residents and local schoolchildren the opportunity to bring the community together through music, learning, and chatting together – bridging the generations through song.

Our Independent Living and Community Engagement teams worked together to create sessions that were uplifting and inclusive, to bring different parts of the local community together. Residents from the independent living schemes were invited to Horwood Court's sing-along with the children of Knutsford Primary Academy.

The students and residents had the opportunity to spend time together and share their views and experiences over an orange squash or cup of tea and chocolate biscuits!

One excited student said: "I've really enjoyed coming to Horwood Court. I liked that we had a break to chat with the residents and I loved singing songs I knew and learning new ones!"

Another child added: "I enjoyed coming to sing in May so much, I chose to come again this term. I'm glad I did as it's such a nice thing to do."

Horwood Court residents were equally complimentary about the sessions, saying: "How thoroughly enjoyable... it was great to sing along with the lovely children! Fabulous! I think that it would be nice if more people from the schemes would join in!"

Another said: "It's been great entertainment, especially with the children. I look forward to meeting up again – thank you!"

The students' teacher, Mrs Freeman, said: "It has been an absolute pleasure to lead the singing sessions again. I love seeing everyone join in with silly campfire songs, old



music hall songs, action songs, songs from Mary Poppins, songs from other countries and classics like Que Sera and White Cliffs of Dover with equal enthusiasm.

"It's a great opportunity for our communities to come together and socialise as we make music. Thank you to all who came and all involved with the organisation."

Looking for business advice?



If you're thinking of starting a small business or already have one, Wenta offers a great range of support and advice - whatever stage you're at.

With their original office based right here in Watford, Wenta provides services including free business advice, free training workshops, flexible workspaces, meeting rooms, virtual office services and more.

You can get 12 hours of free advice and support through The Hertfordshire Start-up Programme (HSUP) - so if you are ready to take your business or idea to the next level, find out more by calling 01438 310020 or visiting www.wenta.co.uk.

Free dance and drama classes!

The Dan Tien performing arts studios are offering 13 fully-funded dance and drama classes for Watford Community Housing residents and members of the 'Solo Stars' single parents group.

The classes run from January to March. You can find out more by visiting thedantien.co.uk

If you would like to apply for a place you can call **01923 209183** or email community@wcht.org.uk



Do you need help with your money?

Our amazing Tenancy Support Officers can help you to stay on top of your finances.



We know that money worries can be one of the biggest contributors to stress - and we want our customers to feel supported. That's why we have a dedicated team of knowledgeable and considerate Tenancy Support Officers on hand to provide free, honest and confidential support to all of our customers.

If you are feeling concerned and under pressure because of money worries, our Tenancy Support team can help. There is a range of options available that can help you keep up with rent payments and manage your finances, whatever your situation.

The team will meet with you in person, either at our offices or your home, or talk to you on the phone to discuss worries in a non-judgmental and safe environment.

Providing invaluable support reviews, our Tenancy Support Officers can make a huge difference. From carrying out benefit

checks and making sure you are claiming all the benefits you should be receiving to providing foodbank vouchers, they can help you find ways to improve your situation and help you manage your finances.

Experiencing first-hand the support this team can offer, one resident explained: "They made me feel like a human, not looked down upon. He has been an extremely helpful person going through the transition from old benefits to Universal Credit. They listened, took on board my views and got me in contact with the correct people. I can't stress how grateful I am towards the team."

Whatever your situation, you are not on your own - our Tenancy Support Officers will be with you every step of the way.

So why not reach out to the team today and see how we can help you? Call **0800 218 2247** or email TSupport@wcht.org.uk.

Take CoControl of your home

We've partnered with CoControl Limited to help save you money on your bills!

We want to make sure you live in a warm, healthy and affordable home - so we're joining in with a new initiative to help you save money on your heating bills.

CoControl Limited, a company specialising in devices which help social housing tenants save money on their bills, have developed a smart thermostat and boiler controller which can help you to manage the amount of heating you use, and as a result save money on your bills.

The device, which is installed in your home for free, has been proven to save 15-20% on your heating costs, and some residents who have used a CoControl device have even halved their heating bills!

A CoControl thermostat is easy to use and, as a piece of 'smart' technology, it only requires a small amount of electricity and Wi-Fi bandwidth to run effectively.

If you would like to start saving money on your bills, we'll ask Engie - our improvement programme contractor - to get in touch and arrange a suitable time to fit the device. The installation will take no more than 30 minutes, and we'll show you how to use the device once it's ready to go.

Call us on **01923 209135** to arrange your appointment and start saving money!

What is a CoControl device?

A CoControl device is a smart thermostat which connects via broadband to measure conditions such as humidity and temperature within your home. It learns from activity within your home and optimises the heating for your comfort and to save you money. No fiddly dials or programmers - the system uses simple 'make me warmer, make me cooler' controls to ensure that your home is heated to the temperature you want.

How will it save me money?

CoControl learns the best way to heat your home, with little or no interaction (unless you want to interact with it, of course). It is intuitive and allows you to avoid unnecessarily overheating your home, saving you money on your heating bills. Recent tests for another housing provider have shown savings per household of between 15 and 20%. This saving can amount to £150 a year for many people.

Will it affect how my boiler works?

Not at all - your boiler will continue to work in the same way it usually does! This additional item just needs to be added to the boiler controls. You will receive a hand-held remote control to adjust the temperature

if needed. If you decide that the smart thermostat is not for you then it can revert back to being a normal thermostat.

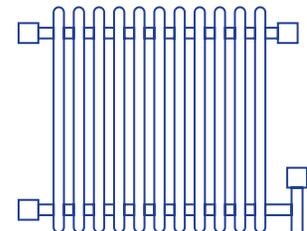
What other information do I need to know?

The device will need to connect to Wi-Fi to work. It uses a very small amount of bandwidth and data.

The boiler unit will also need to be plugged into the mains. Unfortunately, if your heating is part of a communal system we can't offer you a device at the moment.

I have more questions - who can I talk to?

To find out more, please get in touch with Vikki Newman at Watford Community Housing by calling **01923 209135** or emailing **Vikki.Newman@wcht.org.uk**.



Our Christmas opening hours

23rd December: 8:30am - 5:30pm

24th December: 8:30am - 2:00pm

25th to 27th December: Closed

30th December: 8:30am - 5:30pm

1st January: Closed

2nd January: Our office reopens for 2020 at **8:30am**

As ever, when our office is closed you can still call our emergency out-of-hours service on **0800 218 2247**.

And don't forget that you can manage lots of aspects of your tenancy online by signing up for an account through our website - including managing your rent account, requesting repairs, reporting anti-social behaviour and more.

Visit **www.wcht.org.uk** to sign up or log in now!

your voice

Get involved!



If you like the idea of helping us to improve our services, there are lots of ways to get involved with how we're run.

It's really important that all of our customers have the chance to get involved with their local community and to shape our services – as the people on our scrutiny review panel did earlier this year, when they helped us to appoint our new contractor for grounds maintenance and communal cleaning.

The best way to find out how you can get involved is to look at our Involvement Menu, which sets out all the different options so you can tailor your involvement to suit your needs and skills. Get in touch to find out more or search for 'Involvement Menu' on our website.

Over the next few months particularly, we'll be looking for people who are interested in becoming a Board member or joining the Gateway Membership Team, which represents customers. Here you can help make decisions on the big subjects and issues that affect residents.

If you're business-minded, keen to influence big decisions or if you are just passionate about improving your community and making sure residents' voices are heard – please get in touch!

Find out more!

For more information, call **0800 218 2247** or email community@wcht.org.uk.

info

Dates for your diary

Leavesden Green group
carol singing service
Watford Asda
Wednesday 18th December

Leavesden Green
community carol service
Leavesden Green
Community Hub
Thursday 19th December

Leavesden Green
Christmas fun day
Leavesden Green
Community Hub
Monday 23rd December

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

Contact us

T: 0800 218 2247

E: enquiries@wcht.org.uk

www.wcht.org.uk

Have you signed up yet?

We know that your time is precious, so our online services are designed to make life easier for you!

Now you can pay your rent, view your account balance in real time, book a repair at a time that suits you, report anti-social behaviour and more! Managing your tenancy has never been easier.

With a digital account, your tenancy is in your hands. If you haven't signed up for your digital tenancy services account yet, what are you waiting for?

It couldn't be easier, just head to our website at www.wcht.org.uk, hit the 'Your account' button and follow the on-screen instructions.