

# UNDER ONE ROOF



## JUBILEE MEMORIES

As we mourn Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, we warmly remember the joyous occasion of her Platinum Jubilee earlier this year.

Large numbers of residents marked it in glorious style at parties held across Nehemiah's retirement housing schemes. The memorable celebrations were funded by a successful grant application we made to The National Lottery Community Fund.

Tenants had told us how much they missed socialising during the last two years. With restrictions lifted and Queen Elizabeth becoming the first British monarch to mark 70 years on the throne, it was time to come together.

Each retirement scheme had its own festivities, tailor-made to appeal to its tenants' preferences. At Plummer House in Aston, for example, residents tucked into a Caribbean buffet; while at Shanti Niketan in Wolverhampton, South Asian food was enjoyed with music from visiting friends from community charity Everyone Prospers.

The celebrations were topped off with a central Jubilee party at WS10 Banqueting Suite in Wednesbury, when over 150 tenants from our retirement schemes joined together.

Transport was laid on for guests to enjoy a meal, music and dancing. There were raffles and 'champion' awards for residents and staff who go the extra mile.

It was an opportunity to mix, discover more about each other - and party! "I can't remember when I enjoyed myself so much," remembers Debra from Smethwick. "As the Queen said in her Jubilee message, many happy memories were created at festive occasions such as ours. It is yet another reason to thank her."



## NEW HOMES

Residents have been welcomed to sparkling new addresses at Vine Street and Charter Street in Dudley.

Twenty-one local families moved into the first new-build houses we've been able to develop for social rent in recent times.

We wish you all health and happiness in your beautiful new homes.



# SAFE AND WELL

Lusefa Salamon has joined us in the newly-created role of tenancy service officer, after a decade working as a prison officer.

She's found the move into housing work a chance to apply the useful communication skills she's gained working with prisoners and their families.

Her focus now is on supporting you to feel safer by dealing with antisocial behaviour (ASB) and safeguarding issues.

"Safeguarding is about protecting the right to live in safety," explains Lusefa.

"It could be warning of the dangers of storing gas canisters at home, responding to reports of young children being left alone, or a tenant saying they feel so desperate they might harm themselves."

Lusefa is also busy supporting our housing officers in tackling serious or persistent ASB.

"I'm used to communicating with people from different backgrounds," says Lusefa. "For example, knowing how to diffuse situations and even when the hard truth is needed sometimes."

Noise is a top concern for people. "It's about being considerate yet also recognising that 'living noise' is just the sound of life going on," she says.

She has recently helped two neighbours better understand each other's lifestyle differences – one with a young child and the other working shifts. With the help of a translator to overcome a language barrier, they were able to find a way forward.

Lusefa has some tips on creating a harmonious place to live.

"Respect each other and love your community. After all, we all make up our communities! That sense of connection is sometimes lost. So meet your neighbour. The common ground you have might be more than just the street you share."



# HERE FOR YOU

**Julie Campbell has joined us as our housing officer covering homes in Wolverhampton.**

As a Wolverhampton resident herself, she is enjoying supporting people in her own community. She has a passion for housing and plenty of experience gained in various finance roles.

"I like interacting with people and I love the financial side of things too," she says.

"But it's not just about collecting rent. I'm here to listen and support you to keep your tenancy and feel good about where you live."



# DISHONEST REPAIRS



Some tenants have told us about being approached by outside companies acting in a disreputable or misleading way.

They offer to help with your repairs and getting compensation for disrepairs. They might even give the impression of being us.

Sounds helpful. But what they're more likely to do is badger you for information to build a legal case with costly fees attached for you to pay. The only winner is the company trying to profit from the situation.

We want to work with you to fix the problem, without it costing unnecessary expense.

We're keen to carry out repairs quickly and well. So please report them promptly. Don't wait until there is a bigger problem. Talk to us if there are any issues in getting it done. Call the repair line on **0800 849 1400** or from a mobile on **030 30 30 1000**.

# YOU SAID, WE DID

If you receive our services, then you are an expert in knowing what works and what could work better.

All your feedback is useful, whether comments, compliments or complaints. Listening to you helps us to improve.

Here are some examples of what we've done recently as a result of what you've told us at tenant meetings or in other ways.

- Held more frequent tenant meetings on topics of interest, including an online evening meeting about the rent increase



- Appointed a new cleaning contractor, Pine Facilities Services, for communal areas
- Used views from over 50 tenants to help us design the layout of the new website we're developing
- Extended CCTV to the shared laundry room of Charles Pearson House to increase safety
- Upgraded Sky broadband at Shanti Niketan and Plummer House retirement housing schemes
- Consulted with tenants about the new tenants' agreement to make sure the wording is clear and understandable
- Made it easier for you to give repair satisfaction feedback and quicker for us to respond with improvements
- Asked tenants at retirement schemes for their views on how grant money left over from the Lottery Jubilee fund is spent

# FRESHEN UP



Each year we invest in fitting dozens of new kitchens and bathrooms. We replace those which are oldest or most worn out first. We plan the work using information from our property surveys and also what you tell us. So if you think your kitchen or bathroom is in urgent need of a refresh, let us know. We can't promise but we will see what can be done.

# MEET A TENANT

**Robert Mortimer-Harris doesn't like to stop still for long. Since taking a break as a bus driver, Robert has got to know his neighbours at Charles Pearson Court in Smethwick.**

He was one of eight tenants from our retirement schemes recently nominated by other residents for a thank you award for being neighbourly champions. We asked Robert to tell us more.

**I like living here.** I've only been a Nehemiah resident for 18 months and I'm new to Smethwick. But the camaraderie here is good. There's freedom. You're not pressurised to do anything but you're helped if you want to get involved.

**Barbados is where I grew up.** I moved to the England when I was 12. I went on to be a lab technician and then joined the army, before returning to Barbados. I came back to England 16 years ago. Using my

skills in vehicle technology I've worked as a college lecturer and been self-employed, before taking up bus driving.

**My motivation for tenant involvement is guided by my Christian principles.** I try to be a compassionate person. I prefer to be behind the scenes. But you do what you need to do. There are always ways to contribute and make things better.

**I try to strengthen communications within my housing scheme.** Staff can't be everywhere and sometimes residents haven't the confidence to explain what they need to fix a problem. For example, a tenant was struggling with a broken shower but felt too polite to say anything. If I can listen, support and help someone feel more comfortable in their surroundings, I will.



**When something stops it's hard to get things going again.** But it's possible - whether it's a vehicle or an activity! For example, the volunteer visitor who helps organise our coffee mornings was away so I filled in, and decided to offer a bit of lunch to everyone too. Pumpkin rice, chicken wings - it was enjoyable. Sometimes it's best not to be too laid back. If it feels the right thing to do, it usually is.

# ENERGY BILLS

**Energy prices are rising sharply for everyone. This is due to huge global demand after the pandemic and the war in Ukraine affecting supplies from Russia.**

Combined with other cost of living increases, we know this is a worrying time. Below is information to help you prepare and get support. Remember you are not alone. Speak to us if you are struggling.

## How much

**If you pay your utility supplier directly**, it sets the rate you pay. It is limited by the energy price cap – and the Energy Price Guarantee which temporarily replaces it from October. This is the maximum amount suppliers can charge customers for each unit of energy used. The price cap went up in April and was due to rise hugely again. The government has now frozen energy prices for two years. You still pay for what you use. But it means from 1 October 2022 a typical use household won't pay more than £2,500 a year for gas and electricity. This applies to all types of energy tariffs.

If you are struggling to pay your energy bills, don't just stop paying. Tell your energy company. By law, they have to work out a payment plan with you.

**If you pay us for your energy use through service charges** for communal heating systems, the rate is based on contracts we negotiate through wholesale markets to get the best price. The energy price cap does not apply to commercial contracts. (Details of new measures by the government to restrict increases are awaited.) Energy price changes will affect future service charge periods. It means energy service charges for 2023/24 will reflect the huge impact of rising energy costs and will go up significantly.

Although unwelcome, increases are in line with what is happening across the economy. There are meetings to talk to you about this and the government support to help reduce the increase.

## Help to pay

The government is giving every household £400 off their energy bill. This is called the **Energy Bills Support Scheme**. You don't need to do anything to get the money and you won't have to pay it back.

It comes in six instalments from October 2022. You'll get the discount monthly, even if you pay for your energy quarterly or use a payment card. How you get the discount will depend on how you pay for energy. Details are awaited on how tenants in



housing with communal heating systems will receive the discount.

If you pay council tax, you should have received £150 back as a **council tax rebate** to help you pay your bills.

Older people who receive a **Winter Fuel Payment** will get an extra £300 in November or December this year.

In addition, a £650 **Cost of Living payment** is being made to you if your household receives Universal Credit, tax credits, pension credit or other means-tested benefits.

## Other support

**Birmingham Settlement** – no matter where you live, money advisors at Birmingham Settlement offer Nehemiah tenants free and independent advice. They can help you prioritise your debts and maximise your income by making sure you're getting all your benefit entitlements. Ask your housing officer to refer you.

**Household Support Fund** – local councils use this government money to target support and some offer grants. See your council's website for details.

**British Gas Energy Trust** – anyone can use this independent charity for money and energy debt advice. There is then the option to apply for a grant. Visit [britishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://britishgasenergytrust.org.uk)

**National Debtline** – 0808 808 4000 or visit [nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)

**StepChange Debt Charity** – 0800 138 1111 or visit [stepchange.org](http://stepchange.org)

**Citizens Advice** – 0800 144 8848 or visit [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk)