

UNDER ONE ROOF

SAFE RETURN

Over the last few months we have all seen big changes to the way we live our lives. Thanks to everybody's amazing efforts in staying at home and reducing the amount of contact we have with other people, we are now beginning to cautiously move forward.

Our experience of coronavirus, and its disproportionate impact on black and minority ethnic communities, means that we all need to continue to take precautions to make sure everyone stays safe.

At Nehemiah we are continuing to follow government advice, and the wellbeing of our tenants and staff remains our priority.

Throughout the pandemic, we have carried out emergency repairs as well as essential gas servicing and electrical safety checks.

Since early June we have resumed all other types of repair work, so please continue to report repairs

that need doing in the usual way, on **0800 849 1400** or from a mobile on **03030 30 1000**.

All work is carried out in line with social distancing rules and with extra safety measures in place too, such as the use of masks and gloves.

Planned maintenance work has also restarted. This includes our external paintwork programme which is brightening up over 300 homes this year.

We are also pleased to be back seeing you – at a safe distance – on our estate 'walkabout' visits, knocking on doors and checking on any repair or neighbourhood issues you might have.

SUPPORT NETWORK

Throughout lockdown, our scheme managers remained in daily contact with those living in our retirement and supported young family schemes. We also spoke weekly to over 100 vulnerable residents in our general housing to check on their wellbeing. These calls proved to be so useful that we are continuing to keep in regular touch by phone.

Some residents have benefited from the help of food parcel deliveries. A big thank you to all the fantastic organisations and volunteers who support us with these, including **Walsall Black Sisters Collective, Parklands Banqueting Suite** and **Birmingham Irish Association**.



MOVING REASONS

For many people, the last few months have been a time for reflection and planning. If you're an older individual or couple you might have considered if your home is still right for you.

Moving to one of our retirement housing schemes is certainly a good option if you enjoy living independently, but also want the reassurance of extra support close at hand.

1. If your home no longer suits your needs

It might be that your current property is simply too big for you, or reduced mobility makes it tricky to get around. The self-contained apartments in our schemes are designed for older people in mind.

2. If you're feeling isolated

Our schemes have a community feel, with garden spaces to enjoy. Communal lounge areas will soon be open again for physically-distanced socialising, plus opportunities to take part in safely organised activities.

Even during lockdown, residents felt the benefit of living in a retirement community. "Even from a distance, it's always great to see and pass the time of day with my neighbours here," said one resident at Charles Pearson Court in Sandwell.



3. If you no longer feel safe living alone

It can be comforting to know that your scheme manager is looking out for you – through their daily check-in phone call with you or being on hand for advice and friendly support. An alarm link gives you access to help at any time.

We have modern, airy schemes in Birmingham, Dudley, Smethwick, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Nehemiah Court in Walsall (pictured above) is newly refurbished and has properties available now, including some spacious two-bedroom apartments.

To find out more, please call us on **0121 358 0966 (option 1)**.

MANJIT'S GOODBYE

We've said a fond farewell to our long-serving and well-known member of staff, Manjit Kaur. After 20 years working with us, most recently as senior housing officer, Manjit has decided to switch to a new career in home energy efficiency.

Her role has been taken up by another highly experienced member of staff, Rita Samuels.

Manjit's passion for housing started as a temp working in Sandwell Council's neighbourhood office. She went on to work as a rents cashier but with her sights set on becoming a housing officer.

Her break came at United Churches Housing, where she was housing officer for seven years before its merger with Nehemiah. Since then, she has covered each of our housing patches at some time – and has got to know many of you well.

"It has been a privilege to gain your trust and cooperation, and I want to thank you for allowing me to become a part of your lives," she says.

She recalls many special moments over the years but one stands out. "A young woman took notice of me working as her housing officer. Just like I had been in the past, she was inspired to ask about the role. I had ignited this little fire of interest! She trained with Nehemiah and is now enjoying a successful housing career."

Leaving us has been a hard decision for Manjit to make. "Nehemiah has made me the



person I am," she says. "I've had an absolutely brilliant career journey here. It's now time to move on and make room for others to flourish, like I have."

Manjit has a final message for all our tenants: "Please don't ever be frightened to pick up the phone and speak to us. We don't just want your rent! We're keen to know that all is well. Whatever you are experiencing, you are not alone. And if you feel you don't want to tell us 'all your business' then we can signpost you to someone else who can help."

RIGHT AT HOME

It is always rewarding to see how residents turn a property from being simply a place to let into a comfortable home. And that's exactly what two new Nehemiah tenants have done, after lockdown restrictions eased and they were able to move in.

Hair stylist Cheyenne wasted no time in showcasing her talent for interior design too! Within a month "working almost day and night" she transformed the look of her house with the help of her mum.

Finished just before her return to work, it is ready to enjoy with her two young children. You can see the results for one room in the photos below.

"I went with the flow and styled it with what I could get during lockdown," recalls Cheyenne. "Coming from a first-floor maisonette, it's lovely to have a house with a garden."

Ashley and Jade are also happy to be settling into their new family home with their baby son. "The landlord of the flat we had before didn't seem to care," says Ashley. "In contrast, Nehemiah kept us well informed throughout our move."



WASTE AWAY

Dumping a mattress or any other rubbish on pathways or around communal bin areas causes a nuisance and makes an area look untidy. It's also a crime.

Fly-tipping is a persistent problem nationwide, costing councils and housing associations millions of pounds a year to clear up. That's money which could be far better spent on other services.

When waste is fly-tipped on land we own we have to pay for its removal. If you are caught dumping it, we will charge you for this cost. We may also take action to prosecute you.

There is no need to dump rubbish. You can take it to a council-run **Household Waste Recycling Centre** (tip) to dispose of it for free. For a home pick up, you can pay a small charge to arrange for your local council to collect bulky items from outside your home. If you live in Wolverhampton and receive full Council Tax benefit you can arrange two free bulky waste collections a year.

If your item is in good condition and can be reused, consider giving it away using **Freecycle** or to **CT Furniture** through its website www.communitytransport.org/donate-furniture

Recycle any waste you can and use the correct bin – not somebody else's. If your communal bin is overflowing, report it to your local council. Let us know if problems continue.



RED ALERT

Sickle cell disease is the country's fastest growing genetic disorder. It affects around 15,000 people of all ages in the UK, including some of our tenants and staff. They are amongst those who remain extremely vulnerable to the risks of the virus and still have to take extra care.

Sickle cell disease causes blood cells to change shape and create blockages. It is a potentially life-threatening condition and is particularly common in people with an African or Caribbean family background.

The main symptoms are anaemia and episodes of severe pain. Some people need regular blood transfusions as treatment. NHS Give Blood is calling for more black donors to come forward to help patients.

"It's an invisible, lifelong condition that can vary between individuals from mild to serious. It can also affect you differently from one day to the next," explains Lakeisha Sewell, our customer engagement officer.



"Greater awareness of the condition can only help understanding and the ability to look out for one another," she adds.

For more information and support please visit the website www.sicklecellsociety.org

BLACK POUND DAY

Many of us have been deeply affected by the global reaction to the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. It has highlighted some stark inequalities, made worse by the pandemic's economic impact.

National **Black Pound Day** was set up to support black businesses and the growth of the UK economy. It invites all communities to consciously buy from a black-owned business on the first Saturday of each month.

The city of Birmingham is backing this and encouraging businesses to sign up and register on the Black Pound Day website www.blackpoundday.uk

Our chief executive, Llewellyn Graham, is a supporter too. "This is the kind of positive action needed to help lift the black community out of entrenched disadvantage. Please do get involved if you can."



RATE US

A regular telephone survey is checking your satisfaction with our services.

We are using independent market researchers to gather your feedback.



One resident, for example, responded by saying they were: "Happy with the support from my landlord". Another said: "Brilliant housing officer... easy to get hold of and speak to."

But we're not just after your praise! Your feedback helps us target improvements and deal with any issues you may have.

So if you get a call, please do take part. The researcher phoning will explain who they are and what it's about. If you want to check to be absolutely certain it is a genuine call, please phone us on **0121 358 0966** or get in touch with Lakeisha Sewell. Her contact details are at the bottom of this page.

By taking part in the survey you'll have the chance to win £50 in a quarterly prize draw. Our last lucky winner was Michelle from Wolverhampton.

Please let our customer engagement officer Lakeisha Sewell know if you have any comments about this newsletter or any news to share for the next issue.

Call: 0121 358 8031 or 07739 705048

Email: lakeisha.sewell@nehemiah.co.uk

Write: Nehemiah Housing Association, 1-3 Beacon Court, Birmingham Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 6NN

SMART MONEY

The full impact of coronavirus is likely to be felt over the coming months, including in your pocket.

Please speak to us straight away if you are having problems paying your rent. We're here to help with reliable advice and support, whether you've spoken to us often or have never needed to before.

If you are in the fortunate position of being able to save – even a little – there's a savings account for low-income earners on Universal Credit that is worth a good look.

The **Help To Save** scheme gives you 50% on top of the highest amount you've had in the account after two years. That's even if you had since taken the money out.

It allows you to save up to £50 a month – but you can open an account with just £1 and you don't have to save every month.

For details, visit the website
www.gov.uk/get-help-savings-low-income

