

UNDER ONE ROOF

SAFE AT HOME

The safety of our tenants and staff is our top priority. Across our communities, people are playing their part by staying home to stop the spread of coronavirus.

This is an unusual time for everybody – and a difficult one for many. What’s positive though is how people are adapting to the new ways of living and working.

As your landlord, we aim to keep any disruption to a minimum and to continue to provide the services you need – some now more than ever before. Our staff are able to work from home and they remain ready to give support should you need it.

Our scheme managers are staying in daily contact with residents living in our retirement housing and supported family schemes. We’ve introduced new things too, such as making regular phone calls to check on the wellbeing of vulnerable residents in our general housing.

Talking is important for everyone at this time. We know that tenants’ friends and family are also stepping up to keep in greater touch with loved ones and to give extra support.

Until further notice, we are only carrying out emergency repairs. This is to reduce day-to-day contact and help keep everyone safe. More details are on page 2.

We recognise you may encounter money difficulties over the coming weeks if your income is affected. There is no need to feel isolated over money worries. If you think you may struggle to pay your rent, please see inside for information on how we can help.



HAPPY ENGAGEMENT

We are delighted to welcome Lakeisha Sewell to the new and important role of customer engagement officer.

With a strong customer focus and having worked as a business analyst for a charity and a manufacturing company, Lakeisha knows how to break down problems, examine the facts and get things done!

“I’m excited about the plans we have to encourage greater idea sharing and solution making with tenants,” says Lakeisha. “It was wonderful to meet residents at Charles Pearson Court during my job interview – and to now be speaking to others by phone. I’m all set to meet many more of you in person as soon as it is safely possible.”

Look out for more information from Lakeisha in the next edition of this newsletter. You can also get in touch with her now – see page 4 page for details.

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PIONEERS

Tributes have been paid to two of our renowned founding fathers who sadly died within a day of each other in early April.

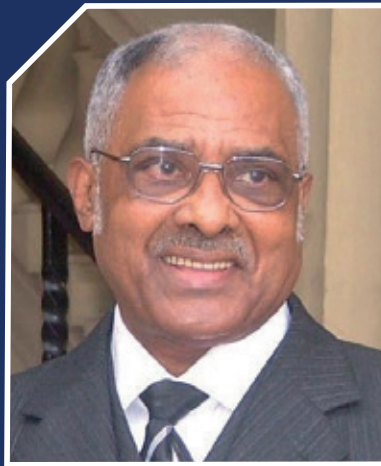
Bishop Theophilus McCalla MBE (top) and **Bishop Horatio Fearon** (below) were giants of their generation, known and loved by many in the communities they served.

The two men worked tirelessly with our current chairman Bishop Wilton Powell to set up Nehemiah in the mid-1980s in response to concerns about poor housing conditions.

They continued to play an important role in our development and helped us to celebrate our 30th anniversary last year.

“In this sadness, we take joy from both men’s legacy,” says our chief executive Llewellyn Graham.

“They inspired and encouraged generations and fought battles to create the culture that is easily taken for granted today.”



[Click here to read our tribute](#)

HELP AT HAND

We have always supported our residents in difficult times – it’s what we do. And while the current coronavirus crisis is something new to us all, we are still here to help and assist with any queries.

Please talk to us straight away if you are having problems paying your rent. We want to help you to pay on time, just like most Nehemiah tenants do, and avoid the build-up of rent arrears.

There are lots of ways we can help you. We can agree an affordable payment plan or flexibly adjust an agreement already in place.

We can also give specialist advice to help you claim benefits to maximise your income.

We have already helped many tenants to claim Universal Credit (UC) for the first time or to make the required move onto UC from housing benefit when their circumstances change.

For example, we can help you decide if a UC Advance payment

(which is a loan you have to repay) is right for you, and tell you about other support available like free school meal vouchers and the Council Tax hardship fund. We can also put you in touch with budgeting and debt advisors.

If you usually pay your rent at a Paypoint or Post Office, don’t worry as there are other ways you can pay, including by direct debit or over the phone.

It can be a relief to know that no court action can be taken for rent arrears at this time. Please also remember that if you have told us you are struggling due to the impact of coronavirus and you are working with us, you will avoid the burden of this risk when life returns to normal.

FIRE AWARE

With more time being spent at home, everyone needs to be a bright spark when it comes to fire safety.

Most house fires start in the kitchen. Always ‘watch what you heat’.

Switch off any electrical items you’re not using. Don’t leave phone or laptop chargers switched on when unattended.

While it’s tempting, please don’t start bonfires. Be considerate of others need for fresh air.

Where possible, especially when you’re asleep, keep all internal doors closed. This helps to stop fire spreading.

Your home’s smoke alarm will alert you to any fire so test it regularly. It is easy to do and usually involves just pressing and holding the button. Let us know if your smoke alarm does not work.

If a fire does happen, don’t be tempted to tackle it yourself. Get out (closing doors as you go), stay out and call 999.



Pay your rent

It is still due. We use it to cover the cost of providing and maintaining your home. Paying it is an essential condition of your tenancy. Even in these difficult times, living rent-free or having a rent holiday is unfortunately not an option!

Talk to us

We’re here to help – whether you have spoken to us often, or you have never needed to before now. Get in touch if you’re struggling or just need some reliable advice. Answer our calls if we are trying to reach out to you.

RIGHT AT HOME

Two new and experienced housing officers have joined us. We've welcomed **Tavepo Masawi** to cover our homes in North Birmingham and **William Hughes** for Wolverhampton.

They are already building a great rapport with tenants, despite not being able to visit you on your home patch at the moment.

Before joining us, Tavepo was a support worker and housing officer at Midland Heart and at Worcestershire YMCA. He studied law and has a master's degree in corporate governance and financial regulation. "It was while I was studying the 2008 financial crisis that I realised the importance of housing to the wellbeing of society. It led me to a career in housing, which I really enjoy," says Tavepo.

William brings over 23 years of housing experience as a team leader for a project helping people at risk of homelessness to live independently. "Many of us find managing our finances can be tricky at times," says William. "So it's great to be able to use my experience to reassure and guide Nehemiah tenants, especially now when it's easy to feel overwhelmed by a loss of work, income or routine."

All of our housing team are here to give support. They also understand it's not all about money worries.

"I was talking to a resident today who wanted to increase his direct debit payment. But it wasn't just about that," says William. "He was self-isolating and hadn't spoken to anyone for a long time. For both of us, it was just good to talk."

Housing officers - here for you



Name: Tavepo Masawi

Area: North Birmingham (including Handsworth, Lozells, Hockley and Aston)

Contact:

0121 358 8038
07739 636115
Tavepo.Masawi@nehemiah.co.uk



Name: William Hughes

Area: Wolverhampton

Contact:

0121 358 8039
07595 651112
William.Hughes@nehemiah.co.uk



Name: Rubina Sharif

Area: Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell, Coventry and South Birmingham

Contact:

0121 358 8035
07872 373649
Rubina.Sharif@nehemiah.co.uk

EMERGENCY REPAIRS ONLY

We are only able to carry out emergency repairs at present. These are essential works that keep you and your home safe, including gas and electrical servicing and repairs to fix problems such as having:

- No electricity
- No heating or hot water
- A burst water pipe or blocked drain
- An insecure front or back door
- A window or door to be boarded up
- A leaking roof
- A broken toilet when it's the only toilet in your home



On all essential visits, our contractor's engineers follow social distancing rules and use PPE (personal protective equipment) including disposable gloves and masks.

Before they visit, we will ask if you are self-isolating or shielding due to the virus. This is so that we don't put you or our contractors at risk. We aim to take an individual approach with you on the arrangements for entering your home to do the work.

Call the repair line in the usual way, on freephone **0800 849 1400** from a landline or **03030 30 1000** from a mobile.

Please also continue to report non-emergency routine repairs as these will be logged and done at a later date.

If you have any repair issues or need more advice, please call our property services officer **Shefteeq Rahman** on **07872 373648** or trainee **Joshua Grizzle** on **07811 396594**.

ON BOARD

After an enjoyable brief spell working as a bus driver, **Ruby Golding** has returned to a career she loves most: being a retirement scheme manager.



Ruby joins our supported housing team as our scheme manager for Woodside House in Shard End and Father Joe Taaffe House in Digbeth. She brings with her many years of experience working in a similar role for Waterloo Housing in Shard End.

"I started with Nehemiah just as lockdown began, so the chance to fully meet and bond with residents is something still for me to enjoy later on," explains Ruby. "But it's great to be back doing a job I love. As a Christian, it gives me great joy to be able to do something that makes someone's life a little bit easier."

TAKE CARE

There is a lot of information out there – and some of it is unreliable. Stick with trusted sources, like these.

Coronavirus advice

The best information about the symptoms and staying well are on the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

Visit also the government website

www.gov.uk/coronavirus and your local council website.

Beware of fake messages and scams and report them: www.actionfraud.police.uk/

Mental health

Now more than ever, it's ok to not be ok.

Mental health charity Mind has good advice:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/

Community support

A hub by West Midlands Combined Authority has useful information on everything from food banks to staying active in your area:

beta.wmca.org.uk/the-mayor/community-support-hub/



Domestic abuse

If you or someone you know is suffering from domestic abuse, isolation rules do not apply. Help remains available from West Midlands Police at

west-midlands.police.uk/your-options/

domestic-abuse and from other support services:

www.ipwm.org.uk/Domestic-Abuse-Support/Help-and-Advice/

Call 999 if you are in immediate danger.

And remember we are here for you too. Talk to your housing officer and follow our Facebook page.

GOOD TO TALK

In February, we hosted a community talk visit by a key member of the government.

Its purpose was to give an insight into the concerns and aspirations for housing and economic wellbeing by the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community in the West Midlands.

The visit was by Cannock Chase MP Amanda Milling (pictured third on the left), who is the government's minister without portfolio and chairman of the Conservative Party.

Joining her were Nicola Richards, MP for West Bromwich East, and Jay Singh-Sohal, the Conservative candidate for the role of West Midlands police and crime commissioner. Local church and school representatives also took part.



“Together we showcased what we do, and gave a clear call to the government to support us in opening up opportunities and addressing the challenges facing our communities,” explains our chairman Bishop Wilton Powell.

Please let us know if you have any comments about this newsletter or any news to share for the next issue.

Get in touch with our customer engagement officer Lakeisha Sewell on 0121 358 8031 or 07739 705048 or by email on lakeisha.sewell@nehemiah.co.uk You can also write to her via our usual main office address:

1-3 Beacon Court, Birmingham Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 6NN
(Please note, this office is closed during the current national lockdown.)