teachers' housing association

Issue No. 55 Christmas 2020

Newsletter \*

All at Teachers' Housing Association wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

# **Covid-19 – Working Together**

In March this year we faced an unprecedented challenge when Covid-19 emerged. Everyone involved with Teachers' Housing Association has worked together to try and support our tenants and partners during the pandemic and we have all had to adapt to different ways of working.

I'm proud of the way in which everyone — tenants, staff and our Management Board — have supported each other during these challenging times.

Our Head Office staff continue to

work remotely since lockdown in March with skeleton staffing in the office when government restrictions have allowed. We adapted swiftly to using new I.T. platforms to hold virtual meetings and communicate effectively from our homes. For a period of time we had to suspend letting of properties but, once able to resume lettings, our housing team have found new ways to ensure that lettings are completed as safely as possible.



The safety of tenants and staff has been our priority. Our housing team adopted a programme of contact calls to

tenants to check on wellbeing and see if any

additional support was needed. These were reinstated during the latest lockdown restrictions. I particularly want to thank our scheme and area based staff for the support and commitment they have shown supporting our tenants during the pandemic. We have heard many examples of what a difference this has made to people and this was reflected in some of the calls we received as part of our annual Phone-a-Manager Day in October.

We worked closely with our contractors from the start to ensure we could initially continue to provide essential and emergency repairs, and then

resume our full responsive repairs service as soon as



permitted. We take this opportunity to thank our contractors for working so closely with us and liaising so carefully to update us on their safe working practices which have all been reviewed due to Covid-19.

We've tried to keep tenants updated about our service arrangements

during the pandemic via letters and bulletins on our website. We will continue to adapt our procedures and protocols to ensure that we deliver our services safely and to a high standard.

I would like to pay tribute to all THA's staff,

particularly those involved in front line services, who have worked so hard to ensure that we support our tenants during the pandemic. You will see examples of that support illustrated within this Newsletter. If you feel there are further ways in which THA can support you please let us know.

Sian Llewellyn Chief Executive



### **Christmas Closure**

Teachers' Housing Association Head Office in London will close for the holiday period at 5pm on Wednesday 23 December 2020, and will re-open at 9am on Monday 4 January 2021. Emergency contact details are set out on the back cover of this Newsletter.



### **Changes to the THA Board**

One year ago in December 2019, Chris Bright relinquished his role as Chairperson of the Association's Management Board having served in the role for 3 years. Chris then left the THA Board following the May 2020 meeting and we thank him for his commitment and service over a number of years. Maurice

Rumbold was subsequently elected to the role of Chairperson. Maurice joined the Board in 2017 bringing a broad range of experience in trustee and senior management roles in the not for profit and public sectors. He is committed to the provision of a wide variety of housing and



support services aimed at meeting individual needs as closely as possible.

There have been further changes to the Board's composition more recently and, following a successful recruitment programme, three new Board Members will be co-opted from January 2021. We welcome them and look forward to their contribution. The THA Board with their experience and background noted is:

Maurice Rumbold: Chairperson - Board; Governance, Social and Health Care

Annabel Beach: Vice Chairperson - Board; HR Manager

**Felicia Wright**: Chairperson - Finance, Audit & Development Committee; *Accountant* 

**Peter Wilkins**: Chairperson – Operations Committee; *Property Services Manager* 

Tom Casey: Board Member; Development Manager

Maabena Adae-Amoakoh: Board Member; Accountant & Finance Director

Simon Beresford: Board Member; Building Society CEO

Sandra Fawcett: co-opted Board Member; Housing Operations Director

**Claire Kearney**: co-opted Board Member; *Technology and Operations Director* 

Kiran Singh: co-opted Board Member; *Housing Head of Service*.



### **Remember your Neighbours**

While Christmas can be a happy time for people, some find this a sad and challenging time and many people face spending Christmas alone. This may especially be the case this year if tenants are unable to join friends and relatives over the festive period.



Think of those who live around you; are they alone? A small gesture such as a card, gift or popping by to wish them happy Christmas on the day itself could mean a great deal to those who are by themselves.

This Christmas may be a different time for us all. If lockdown persists then we ask that everyone does their best to adhere to the lockdown measures, whatever they happen to be. If you are able to celebrate with friends and family over Christmas, then please be considerate to your neighbours and ensure any visitors you have to your home do not exceed any permitted numbers and be mindful of noise nuisance and causing a disturbance to those around you.

### **Staff Moves**

There have been just a few staff changes in the past year. We said a fond farewell to Rapinder Sangha (Housing Manager at Head Office); Richard Heyse (Caretaker at Romaleyn Gardens); Jane Davies (Cleaner at Queen Mother Court). We welcomed Anthony Ogbue (Housing Manager at Head Office); Roy Palmer (Cleaner at The Anchorage); Trevor Williams (Caretaker at Romaleyn Gardens); Molly Grey (Cleaner at Queen Mother Court). We wish them all every success.

### **Our new Housing Manager**

Hello, I'm Anthony Ogbue, the new Housing Manager at Teachers'

Housing Association. I started with THA back in February 2020, looking forward to a new challenge and I was not disappointed. I have over 20 years' experience working in housing management for different housing associations in London, with this experience mostly in general needs housing. The first lockdown at the end of March was a challenge but I have previous experience working at home and was able to carry on with the majority of my duties working



remotely. Early visits to schemes were cancelled but, as restrictions eased, I scheduled visits to my schemes in Paignton, Christchurch and Rottingdean which was a great help to settling in the role, as were the staff at Head Office who have been very welcoming. We're still in a difficult period but I look forward to more normal times and meeting more tenants across all my sites and schemes.

### Gardens in Bloom at New Park Gardens



There have been times in 2020 when there seemed to be little cause for celebration. However, we were delighted to hear about a community environment project at New

Park Gardens, Stoke-on-Trent. Local Councillors pump funded the project enabling residents at New Park Gardens to work on a range of gardening projects across the scheme. Gardening during lockdown made a huge difference to residents taking on tasks — large and small - regardless of age. We look forward to seeing the fruits of the autumn bulb planting project. Well done and a huge thank you to everyone involved.







## **Muswell Hill Road**

The Haringey cyclical programme for 2020/2021 included the redecoration of two hostels and four other street properties. The works are nearing completion and have been a success; 192 Muswell Hill Road looks totally refreshed. We hope that the tenants are pleased with the results. We'd like to thank tenants for their patience and understanding while the works took place. We know it has not been easy accommodating the works during difficult times.



### Phone-a-Manager Day 2020

Our Phone-a-Manager Day took place on 22 October. Due to the pandemic, it was a slightly different event this year as none of the Senior Management Team were physically in the office. Tenants who called were able to leave a message and receive a call back.



This year we were contacted by 32 tenants from across our properties with 24 calls coming from tenants in sheltered housing. A large number of calls came from tenants who wished to praise the Scheme Managers and their teams for the support they provided during lockdown. A number of other calls were also complimentary about THA and the service we provide.

Some callers wished to highlight concerns about their scheme and we continue to work to address these issues. Calls coming from our general needs tenants were varied and concerned repair issues at properties and services delivered. With the odd exception, there were no specific trends identified.

In this difficult year, we really appreciate that tenants took time out of their day to provide feedback. All at THA are available to take feedback from tenants at any time of the year, so please do not feel you have to wait until the 2021 Phone-a-Manager Day to contact us.

We would like to remind tenants that repairs should be reported as soon as you are aware of the issue and you should not wait to notify us.

# **Sheltered Schemes**

Tenants will be aware that we usually feature articles from across our sheltered schemes in our newsletters. This year, due to the pandemic, the opportunity for tenants to enjoy their usual activities has been limited and regular events that take place

at sheltered schemes such as garden fetes, Macmillan Coffee Mornings and even the annual THA Summer Walkabout have all been affected.

We know that this has not been a normal year for anyone but we are aware of the increased feelings of

loneliness and isolation that some of our tenants have reported. Our Scheme Managers have worked hard during this period to help keep tenants' spirits up and keep people connected and they have found

creative ways to do this.

Tenants at **The Dene**, Rottingdean and Dunham Gardens, Hull enioved outdoor, socially distanced concerts during the summer months which were well

received. Tenants at Peter Kennedy Court, Croydon

were able to enjoy the extensive grounds and had socially distanced picnic lunches or fish and chips with friends and family once the first lockdown ended. At **The Dene** where a full meals service is provided, meals were served in tenants' rooms during the first lockdown and staff clocked up significant mileage walking around the scheme delivering three meals a day, seven days a week.



#### At Queen Mother Court,

Birmingham, tenants got creative and we saw some rainbows including a knitted one being displayed proudly at the scheme.



Down at Romaleyn Gardens, Paignton, tenants enjoyed a socially distanced **McMillan Coffee** Morning which,

despite being very different to previous years' events, still managed to raise much needed funds for the charity.

At **The Anchorage**, Christchurch, tenants were able to enjoy the fact that their scheme is located close to the sea whilst their lounge and communal areas were locked down. At New Park Gardens, Stokeon-Trent, some tenants got involved in community planting programmes during the lockdown to brighten their local area.

All of our scheme staff including Cleaners, Kitchen Assistants, Cooks, Caretakers and Handypersons across all sites have gone above and beyond to keep their schemes clean, well maintained and running as close to normal as possible. We thank all of our scheme staff for their hard work during this year.

> We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our sheltered housing tenants for their support, patience and understanding as we worked our way through the restrictions imposed on us all.

We hope that as we move through the winter period, you all remain safe and well.













### **Pay Your Rent**

2020 has been difficult for many and the temptation may be to spend more on Christmas this year to compensate. However, the cost of Christmas can quickly add up. Follow these tips to avoid a festive season debt hangover.



#### Pay your rent first

Paying your rent should always be top of your Christmas list. It can be tempting to spend your money elsewhere, but rent is a priority debt so start 2021 off on the right foot and ensure your rent account is kept up to date.

#### Set a Christmas budget - and stick to it

Remember, Christmas Day is just one day - don't ruin the whole of next year paying for it. Ask yourself, "What can I afford to spend on Christmas?", then budget accordingly.

#### Don't forget the everyday bills

Rent, utility bills, food and other commitments still have to be paid for.

#### Don't bank on an overdraft

If you need more money, don't go overdrawn at the bank without talking to them first - it will work out more expensive.

#### Keep it simple

If you can afford to you should pay for your presents by cash, debit card or cheque. Try not to be persuaded into taking out credit agreements or using credit cards as they will often work out more expensive and leave you with longer term debt.

#### Buy safe to be safe

Whatever the deal is, don't buy from unauthorised traders and don't borrow from unauthorised lenders. You may be buying illegal counterfeit goods - or be paying extortionate rates of interest.

And, these tips are not just for Christmas. Follows these and you'll find it easier to manage your money throughout the year.

### Housing Services Director obtains Chartered Institute of Housing Qualification

Our Housing Services Director, Kevin Turner, has recently been 'back to school' studying for his Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) qualification.

Starting in May 2019, Kevin studied for his CIH Level 4 Certificate in Housing. He completed six assignments across the year, covering subjects such as Housing Policy, Managing Change and Housing Management. In June 2020 Kevin completed his final assignment and received confirmation shortly after that he had successfully completed the course and is now a member of the CIH. Kevin said "going back to study after such a long time away from it was a daunting prospect but I really enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the housing sector and gain a recognised qualification".

### Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published a Complaint Handling Code that housing providers are required to follow. The Code set out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

The key areas in the Code are:

#### **Universal definition of a complaint**

Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service

#### The structure of the complaints procedure

Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process

# Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies

Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement

THA last reviewed its Complaints and Appeals Policy in 2018 and we were broadly in line with the requirements of the new Code. We have been required to amend our policy to include the universal definition of a complaint and our timeframes for

responding to a complaint have changed to reflect those set out in the Code. A copy of the revised policy can be



viewed on THA's website and a hard copy is available on request.



Landlords have been asked to self-assess against the Code by 31 December 2020 and publish the results. At THA this self-assessment has taken place and was presented to the THA Board on 24 November 2020 and is available to view on the THA website.

### **Tenant Meetings**

This year has been exceptional in many ways and as a result we have been unable to meet with tenants face to face to discuss various issues.

Sign-ups for new tenants have been completed on platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams. Meetings with existing tenants to discuss concerns have been held on similar platforms or over the telephone.

Our annual events such as the Summer Walkabouts have not taken place this year and we have been unable to hold our pre-Christmas Consultation Meetings in our sheltered housing schemes. We look forward to resuming scheme meetings as soon as we can.



Whilst technology has been invaluable during 2020, we miss the interactions we have with our tenants when we see them in person. We often receive very useful feedback when meetings have finished over a cup of tea and a biscuit.

We hope to be able to visit our schemes on a more regular basis in 2021 and we look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible as soon as it is safe to do so.



### The way we work

Way back in March, Head Office staff joined many others across the country and moved out from our office location to work from home. This presented challenges from I.T. infrastructure, office furniture and equipment, and communication between departments. However, with everybody's commitment to make remote working run smoothly, within a couple of weeks we were into a new routine and operating with minimal disruption. We quickly adapted to using video links both for our internal meetings, Board meetings, as well as liaison with Scheme Managers and outside parties.

A further recent change is a move to an internet based telephone system for Head Office. This is aimed at providing a more flexible system offering callers the following options for direct access to our teams:

**Option 1: Repairs & Maintenance Option 2: Housing Applications &** Enquiries

**Option 3: Rents, Property & Estate issues Option 4: Finance Department** 

**Option 5** General Enquiries





Our Head Office number is unchanged - 020 7440 9440.

### **Development Update**

We continue to explore opportunities to fulfil our mission of providing more homes, particularly for people working in education in London. We've been working with a number of consultants to try and find more opportunities to provide housing. In partnership with Unity Trust Bank we have funding in place to enable us to progress projects and are keen to extend our provision into new areas.

We have seen progress on some of our long term projects including a small project in LB Waltham Forest where we hope to provide six new homes. Significantly, after much delay, we now have planning permission for our proposed project at Peter Kennedy Court, Croydon. This is an exciting project which will provide additional homes for teachers in the Croydon area and include rebuilding some of our existing sheltered housing flats. The project will also enable us to carry out

extensive landscaping works across the scheme.



### **Maintenance Update**

Like other organisations we have experienced disruption to our usual ways of working during the current pandemic. However, we are proud that we

have managed to maintain essential maintenance services throughout this period. We would like to thank staff and contractors for their commitment to THA and our tenants, and also thank tenants for their understanding and working with us during a challenging period.

#### **Routine Maintenance**

Whilst we gave priority to essential repairs earlier in the year we are now working with contractors to provide a full repairs service whilst working within the safe working guidelines set down by the government. As part of our new working practices we are asking tenants for an update on the Covid-19 status of the household when a repair request is made. We are doing this for the safety of both tenants and contractors.

#### **Health and Safety Update**

We are required to undertake health and safety checks throughout lockdown periods and you may have seen contractors or staff carrying out checks to the fire detection system at your property. We have continued with the annual gas safety checks in properties which have an individual gas boiler and we thank tenants for ensuring these have been completed within the required timescale. Electrical safety checks, which are due every five years, have also been carried out.

#### **Cyclical Decoration**

Our decoration programmes for this financial year have been disrupted but we proceeded as quickly as possible following the earlier lockdown and have made good progress in completing the scheduled works.

#### **Update on Major Repairs works**

We have undertaken a refurbishment programme at Verona Drive Surbiton, working in partnership with CLC Contractors Ltd to renew the kitchens. This is the first time we have worked with these contractors and the first time we have used Premier Kitchens Ltd. Although there were some issues along the way, particularly towards the end of the programme which was



consulted regarding future service delivery in due course.

interrupted by Covid-19, the works are now completed and tenants are very pleased with the results.

We have completed the renewal of roofs to two of the converted street properties, one in Haringey and the other in Brent. Additionally, we strengthened the roof structure to a further property in Brent.

The other major programme of works in the last financial year was also at Verona Drive. Spalling concrete of the balconies resulted in repairs being required to these structures and additionally to the metal handrails. We worked in conjunction with consultants Grove Milligan and contractors Alfred Bagnall and Sons (Restoration) Ltd to complete this specialist work.

### Social Housing White Paper

The government published its long awaited Social Housing White Paper in November 2020.

"The Charter for Social Housing Residents", as it is also known, introduces a suite of new regulatory measures aimed at protecting social housing tenants and with that comes extra responsibility for registered providers such as THA.

The white paper covers a number of key issues concerning building safety, tenant satisfaction and transparency. THA will be working through the white paper in the coming months and we will be proving more information to our tenants as we do so.

It is likely that as a result of the white paper, the way we interact with tenants and receive feedback regarding our services will change and tenants will be

Tenants wanting to read more about the

Social Housing White Paper can do so by

search engine. Should you wish to have an initial discussion regarding this matter,

entering the title of the report in to a

please contact Kevin Turner.

### OUT OF OFFICE HOURS EMERGENCY REPAIRS Contact Details

#### **Effective December 2020**



	Plumbing Emergencies	Gas, Central Heating, Hot Water Emergencies	Electrical Emergencies
Bexley	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Brent	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Firmans Court	Relative Group		MAC Services
Haringey	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Verona Drive & Sydney Court	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Old Etonian Housing	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Peter Kennedy Court	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services
Queen Street & Holmesdale Road	Relative Group	Taylor Heating Ltd.	MAC Services

Relative Group0800 0235996Taylor Heating Ltd.01920 870658 / 07825 560187MAC Services020 7486 9075

All sheltered scheme residents should report maintenance issues via the Scheme Manager during working hours or via the Emergency Call System out of working hours.

#### For Clarification, we define emergency works as follows:

- Dangerous structures
- Gas Leaks
- Blocked/overflowing external drains
- Serious flooding or leaks
- Loss of water supply
- Complete failure of electricity supply
- Blocked WC (if there is only one WC)
- Total loss of space and water heating

# Please note that if you call out an emergency contractor for non-urgent work you may be charged by Teachers' Housing Association.

We also ask that you report any emergency repairs, and details of any call-outs, to Teachers' Housing Head Office as soon as possible (0207 440 9440). **Please retain this information sheet for future reference.** 

## Rodent Control

Since the coronavirus lockdown began a number of tenants have contacted us with reports of an increase in domestic rodent activity. It is likely that this increased presence in residential areas is a result of rats searching for food. This is because the rubbish that rats depend on is not as available as it usually would be. As a result, rat populations are reported to have moved further afield to satisfy their need for a food source.

Please also refrain from putting food out for other animals as this will encourage rats to the area.

If you see rats in the grounds please report it to your area staff.



### Water Hygiene

If you live in an area of hard water there will be a lot of dissolved minerals such as magnesium and calcium in the water system. The minerals will be deposited on taps, kettles, washing machines etc. as limescale which you will notice as a hard chalky substance. Limescale deposits provide a source of nutrients for bacteria to multiply and you should descale the taps every three months to remove limescale.

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