My Home

Sheltered housing newsletter

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Issue 8 | December 2023





Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of My Home Sheltered Housing newsletter.

Within this issue we share the good news about residents who have won awards this year, including Gaynor who was presented with a TPAS award, and Janet who was invited to a BBC Radio Devon award ceremony in September.

With a change of season on the way, this issue also contains plenty of helpful advice to keep you safe. From protecting your health to keeping your home condensation-free, we're hoping that you'll find lots of useful information in the newsletter.

We're delighted to introduce our new Chief Executive, Jonathan Cowie in this issue. Jonathan has already visited a selection of our sheltered schemes, and you can read about what else he's been doing in his first weeks on page eight.

At PCH we aim to support you to make the most of your Sheltered Housing community. This Christmas, you may wish to hold a gathering in your scheme, like the coffee morning at Ron King House featured on page nine. If you aren't sure how we can support you with your seasonal get-togethers within your scheme, speak to your Housing with Support Officer and they'll be happy to talk to you about help that's available.

We have also provided some seasonal contact details on page ten for anyone who may like to reach out to other helpful organisations this winter.

We hope you all have a wonderful Christmas & New Year.





Gaynor committed to her community

Gaynor Southerton has been a popular member of her community for some time, involving herself in improving and inspiring those around her, not only for her neighbours, but for residents across the city.

Involved from the moment she moved into her PCH home, Gaynor immediately joined strategic as well as local consultations to help shape the future of PCH, having a real and tangible far-reaching influence on housing in Plymouth.

Having stayed involved through various groups and activities over the years, Gaynor became a resident co-optee with our Customer Focus Committee which is responsible for making sure PCH provides excellent customer services to all of our residents.

Resident is recognised at the Make a Difference Awards

A resident living at Helen Fox House has been presented with a Make a Difference Award by BBC Radio Devon for her community spirt, and for supporting her neighbours in the scheme, as well as those living in Devonport and beyond.

Janet Blank has lived at the Housing with Support scheme in Devonport for 12 years and hosts weekly cash bingo sessions for her neighbours, and those who

are connected to Helen Fox House. Janet is known to be instrumental in the scheme, supporting other residents with their daily tasks and putting on other activities for their enjoyment throughout the year.

Janet was nominated for 'The Great Neighbour Award' and was contacted by the local radio station

to tell her the good news. After being shortlisted, she was interviewed and filmed by BBC Radio Devon. In September 2023 Janet was invited to attend a ceremony at Powderham Castle, near Exeter, and was given an award as a Highly Commended finalist for 'The Great Neighbour Award'.

Residents at the scheme are in awe of the support that Janet provides to her neighbours every day.

Janet said: "I have hosted weekly bingo sessions for many years now, and I enjoy seeing my neighbours and

Gaynor fully supports the Together with Tenants Charter – a national project led by the National Housing Federation which gives residents a stronger voice and helps hold landlords to account – using her voice to be a part of our Resident Scrutiny reviews to examine the decisions and policies that affect the quality of our homes and services.

On a local level, Gaynor, with the support of her fellow residents, organises trips, clubs and activities for her community at the Housing with Support scheme she lives in at Weston Mill.

For her efforts, Gaynor has been awarded a Tenant Volunteer Recognition Certificate from TPAS, the national Tenant Engagement Experts. TPAS promotes, supports and champions tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England.

Gaynor was nominated for the award by Tania Cuxton from PCH's Communities Team who said: "Gaynor's

"Janet is amazing and I appreciate her so much. I look forward to coming to the bingo every week, and as soon as the Thursday session is over, I count down for the next one."

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getting them out and about for a few hours to have some



fun. At the bingo I collect donations which go towards putting on a small buffet for those who attend, and it makes it a bit more friendly and fun.

"As well as running the bingo, I also deliver a daily paper round each day to three residents who are unable to get

their paper, and try to help wherever I can with as many other things as possible. I really enjoy supporting people, and the group is joined by so many lovely people."

Deni, a bingo attendee and local resident, said: "Janet is amazing, and I appreciate her so much. I look forward to coming to the bingo every

week, and as soon as the Thursday session is over, I count down for the next one. I arrive three hours before the bingo and enjoy a good chat with Janet and the others, and we all get on so well. It's absolutely brilliant."

Becky Darce, Housing with Support Manager at PCH, said: "Janet is well known and respected for her contribution and support to others, both at Helen Fox House and in the wider community.

"It's brilliant that her hard work to bring people together has been recognised with this award."

enthusiasm and drive to include everyone in her community are instrumental in the success of her local group of volunteers. She puts together a newsletter that goes to everyone who lives at the scheme. They help to arrange outings, competitions, bingo nights – the list is endless.

"Gaynor spent her own time training to use graphics software to make sure the newsletter was designed to look as good as possible. There is no stopping her and she is very deserving of this

award. Gaynor is a wonderful example of what can be done with determination and spirit and is an asset to her community."



Help with the (ost-of-Living (risis

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The cost-of-living crisis is a real worry for all individuals and struggling households in Plymouth and across the country as a whole.

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Plymouth City Council has created a Cost-of-Living Hub to support people to find help with rising bills and living costs.

Within the hub you will find signposts to the help that's on offer – from financial support including information

How we can help

Cost of living

Plymouth

Plymouth Community Homes know that any change in household finances can be difficult, and we understand the cost-of-living pressures facing our tenants. We are trying to help our tenants with these challenges as much as we can.

PCH and your Housing with Support Officer are here to support you if you are struggling to pay your bills, and can offer help with applying for benefits, reducing your bills or accessing Government financial support, and can put you in contact with our Income Recovery and Financial Inclusion Team.

Household Support Fund

You can access support with energy bills and food with the help of funding from the Household Support Fund, which is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The next round of funding for the Household Support Fund for different eligible categories is open now:

Households where someone has a disability or long-term health condition

- Opens 10am, Thursday 30 November
- Closes 9am, Wednesday 6 December

Single households receiving help with housing costs

- Opens 10am, Friday 8 December
- Closes 9am, Friday 15 December

Applications may close sooner than the date stated if the maximum number of applications are made. To apply, visit **citizensadviceplymouth.org.uk/household-support-fund**

Please speak to your Housing with Support Officer if you need assistance.

about benefits, or help with budgeting. It also includes information on how to help with Council Tax, housing costs and support with food costs, as well as how to contact voluntary organisations across the city.

Visit **plymouth.gov.uk/cost-living** to access the hub.

If you are unable to access the hub, your Housing with Support Officer will be able to help you find the support you need.

Help with energy costs

If you're worried about rising energy bills, there is help available.

The Advisors at Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) are fully trained to work in the community. They can listen to your needs and can also:

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- Visit you in your home
- · Attend a group or drop in
- Go along to community events
- · Hold training sessions or workshops.

You can contact them for support on 01752 477117.

Welcoming community spaces

Located throughout Plymouth, Wellbeing Hubs make it easy for you to access information, health and community services. They can help you find out what's happening in your community.

Each Wellbeing Hub can help with health advocacy, debt advice, mental health support, opportunities to volunteer, employment advice, and general information and advice.

There are currently Wellbeing Hubs at the following locations:

- The Rees Centre, Plympton
- Four Greens Centre, Whitleigh
- William Sutton Hall, St Budeaux
- Improving Lives, Mannamead
- Jan Cutting Healthy Living Centre, North Prospect

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Age UK, The William and Patricia
 Venton Centre, Mount Gould

PCH in Bloom

Residents in Estover create community garden

Earlier this year, residents living at a PCH Housing with Support scheme in Estover came together to start a community garden where they could grow an abundance of fruit and vegetables.

All residents living in the 33 flat scheme were invited to get involved with the project, with many contributing physically and others making a monetary donation to aid the planting.

Jenette Austin, Francis and Gill who are the keen gardening residents living at the scheme are delighted with the introduction of their new planter, pots of flowers and fruit trees, and they look forward to when they can plant again in the coming months.

Jenette said: "Before we started our new community garden, I had never planted a single thing in my life, but I am really happy that as a scheme we are pulling together and planting such a variety of fruit, vegetables and even flowers.



Stunning flowers and wildlife in Plympton

Throughout the summer, a resident living in Plympton was joined in his garden by hedgehogs, woodpeckers, blue tits, wrens and other wildlife.

Their garden is filled with stunning flowers, and the resident continues to look after and cultivate them throughout the year. Their love for growing flowers started in school, and they are continuing to grow different varieties of flowers as it supports their mental health.

The resident said: "I also enjoy learning about birds, and this has helped me to read and develop my reading skills. Bird watching makes my heart sing, and it is just heaven being able to live in a space where I can grow so many flowers and see so much wildlife."

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"This is the start of a new beginning and I love that it is bringing everyone together. Without the support of our PCH Housing with Support officers we wouldn't have got to where we are now."

Karen Stone, Housing with Support Officer at PCH, said: "It is lovely to see all the residents socialising together and growing such an incredible range of fruit and vegetables."



Brock House Communal Garden

This Summer, residents living at Brock House continued to work on their communal garden, which was filled with an abundance of flowers. The space is available for residents at the scheme to enjoy, with benches and umbrellas so that they can enjoy the outside space when the sun comes out.



Dealing with damp, mould and condensation

During your twice-yearly, routine property check, your Housing with Support Officer will look out for any damp, mould and condensation in your home. Officers also carry out monthly routine checks of the communal areas.

If you spot signs of damp, mould and condensation in the meantime, please make your Housing with Support Officer aware and they can support you. We take damp and mould very seriously, and have a specialist team who can visit and inspect if there are issues in a property which we need to deal with.

Helpful tips to keep you safe this winter

Damp, mould and condensation can be bad for your health, and it can make your home less pleasant to live in.

Sometimes the cause of mould can be condensation, and this often builds up in modern, well-insulated homes.

Condensation is simply moisture in your home that hasn't been able to escape - and moisture can be created through cooking, drying clothes, showering and even breathing.

As the weather starts getting colder in the months ahead, here are some simple steps to help prevent condensation from building up at home.

It's all about airflow

One thing to keep in mind when preventing condensation is air flow.

Ensuring there is space for air to move will help prevent condensation from building up.

This goes for just about everything from ensuring there are gaps between furniture and the walls, to cleaning the inside of cupboards and drawers if they are too full.

Cooking



Use a lid if boiling things in a pan - this will save energy, speed up the cooking process and stop steam from escaping



Whether you are roasting, frying, or boiling, this will generate steam. Use the extractor fan or open a window briefly to allow steam to escape

Washing



Dry clothes outside where possible

If drying clothes indoors, try to leave a window slightly open



Open a window briefly after doing the dishes

Shut the bathroom door when having a shower or bath

It's important to be vigilant when it comes to scammers or organisations who may promise things they can't deliver and leave you out of pocket.

Residents are warned to be especially aware of disreputable firms who are actively targeting tenants of social housing associations at the moment, and encouraging them to make disrepair claims by promising large sums in compensation. Some firms can pledge 'no win no fee' deals and urge tenants to agree to make

Sean heads up new team to tackle damp and disrepair

Sean Watson has been appointed as our new Damp and Disrepair Manager to manage a team specialising in dealing with cases of damp, mould and disrepair.

PCH has been working hard to improve how we manage Sean will oversee two new Repairs Supervisors who damp and mould in our homes and we've followed guidance will specialise in damp inspections, as well as head up from the Housing Ombudsman, which published a report our internal Damp Project Group, which is a team of staff in October 2021 urging a change in culture by landlords to from across the organisation who continue to monitor improve experiences for residents. our progress against the Housing Ombudsman's 26 recommendations for housing providers.

We've already created a new Damp and Condensation Policy to set out what residents can expect from us. shared a user-friendly animated video guide explaining how we can help with damp problems and sharing tips for how to reduce condensation, and made wholesale changes to our reporting process and timeframe for damp inspections.

The next step is the creation of a new, specialist department focused on managing cases and improving our response, and the appointment of Sean and his team

Winter word search

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unnecessary legal claims which can fail, leaving tenants having to pay expensive court costs.

Even if claims are successful, tenants can be left with a very small amount of money after huge legal bills are deducted, or the compensation can even be less than the legal bills owed, so residents can end up in debt.

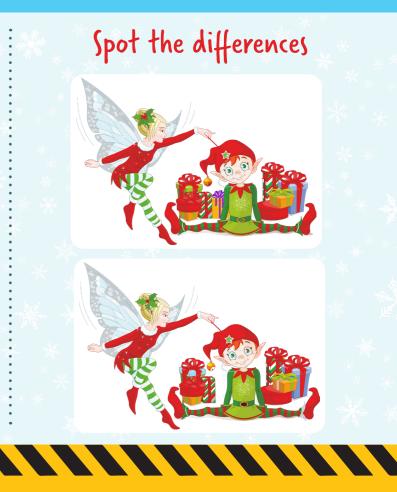
Anyone can be the victim of a scam. Scams can include: telephone calls, letters, emails, text messages and in

BE WARY OF 'NO WIN NO FEE' CLAIMS

shows our ongoing commitment to a zero-tolerance and proactive approach to responding to incidents of damp and mould in residents' homes.

Sean, who stepped into the role in August, said: "I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make a real difference to the everyday lives of our residents through this new role.

"My focus will be on continuously educating staff and residents on damp and mould and what we can do to combat it. As an organisation, PCH is taking damp and mould seriously and doing the right thing by taking a proactive approach to get ahead of problems before they arise."



person. Learn about the latest scams, how to reduce the chances of being scammed and know what to do if you think you have been targeted.

Express your interest in a free scam awareness workshop, coming to a scheme near you soon!

Contact your Housing with Support Officer, or Ashleigh Knowles on 0800 230 6500 or email learnforfree@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

New Chief Executive appointed for Plymouth Community Homes

This autumn, Jonathan Cowie joined Plymouth Community Homes as its new Chief Executive, taking over from John Clark after he retired following seven years at the helm.

Here we introduce Jonathan, find out some more about his background, interests and focus for PCH, and put some of your questions to him.

Who is the new CEO?

Jonathan Cowie has a long career of working in the housing sector, most recently as Chief Operating Officer at VIVID housing association, as well for telecommunications and customer service companies.

What else can you tell us about Jonathan Cowie?

Jonathan has recently moved to Devon with his wife Lisa, and they are living just outside Plymouth in the South Hams. The couple have two sons, one who works as a supermarket manager and the younger attends university.



Angela from North Prospect asked: **"What are you going** to do about damp and mould? We've read about people dying from mould in their social housing flats and it's very scary."

Jonathan said: "We have a zero tolerance approach to damp and mould in your home and are focused on working hard to improve how we respond to reports from residents."

"There is a new specialist team at PCH who are skilled specifically around dealing with damp and mould, and if you're concerned about damp in your home, please get in touch so the team can arrange an inspection. Call us on 0808 230 6500 or message through MyPCH or our website." In his spare time, Jonathan enjoys watching rugby, walking the South West coast, following F1, and exploring history, which he studied at university.

Jonathan is enjoying getting to know the area and its people as well.

He said: "I'm really looking forward to exploring Plymouth more. I have been really enjoying the coastal paths in Devon - and the great pubs - and still lots to explore. I'd welcome any recommendations."

What will the new CEO be focusing on at PCH?

Jonathan said: "I moved to work in social housing because I wanted to make a real difference to peoples' lives as part of their local communities. Housing plays such a crucial role in our health and well-being and our home is the safe place when we close our front doors. What I love most about working in social housing is working with residents, colleagues and engaged stakeholders to solve problems together, to help the community thrive. In my view, this is the only way we can ensure we are working on the right priorities."

We asked PCH residents to share their questions for Jonathan, and here are a selection.

Gill from Weston Mill asked: "Why are we not receiving the service we pay for? We pay for ten grass cuts a year and get half of that; in this cost-of-living crisis we're paying over the odds, what will you do about it?"

Jonathan said: "PCH has always aimed to undertake nine grass cuts each year, but these have to be prioritised for health and safety and are dependent on the weather; if it's too wet, it isn't safe for a cut to happen, for example.

"But residents are only ever charged for the cuts they receive – if we carry out less due to weather conditions, the service charges are reduced so residents are only charged for the actual grass cuts undertaken."

Jack from Devonport asked: "Why does it take so long to get a repair booked?"

Jonathan said: "We're sorry if it's taking longer to book repairs; this is certainly not our intention. We're working hard to respond to repairs requests as quickly as we can.

"Over the last 12 months, we completed standard routine repairs within 13 days on average, and we aim to respond to all emergency repairs within 24 hours. We're working hard to improve turnaround times and making sure we have the right contractors in place so we can respond more quickly."



Thank you, Bernie!

Bernard (Bernie) Boasden has been a Camels Head Sheltered Housing resident for over 30 years, and at the age of 87 he has decided to step down from social group planning to focus on spending time with his wife, Bobbie.

During his time as Vice Chair for the social group, Bernie was a bingo caller every Wednesday, and took part in darts on a Monday evening, but has now completely stepped down, still attending the different events for his enjoyment.

Despite entering into retirement, in his free time, Bernie now creates and sells cards for any occasion to raise money for the social group, and he once enjoyed creating beautiful cross stitch pictures and oil paintings which are now displayed with pride in his home with Bobbie.

Bernie said: "I am very glad to have been a part of the social group after 30 years, however I am sad to give it up, but it was just one of those things, I needed to retire.

"I love it here at the scheme, and I look forward to still joining in with the weekly events and activities where I can."

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Ron King House hosts its very own MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT Coffee Morning

In October, residents living at Ron King House hosted a coffee morning to raise money for MacMillan Cancer Support.

The event was organised by Linda, a resident living at the Stonehouse Housing with Support scheme, and raised an amazing £448.87 for the charity.

The money raised will help the charity in supporting people across the UK and in Plymouth living with cancer.

What else do they do?

- Raise money to fund their services – they are 98% funded by voluntary organisations
- Support the cancer workforce
- Research into cancer care
- Influence decision makers – running public campaigns
- Help employers
 support staff

His neighbours are grateful for his commitment to the scheme and for supporting them for many years.

Gaynor Southerton, Treasurer for the social group at Camels Head, said: "Bernie is a keen gardener, avid Plymouth Argyle fan and artist, as well as a great

individual who was committed to supporting residents of our scheme in Camels Head for many years.

"Speaking on behalf of residents at the scheme, and members of the social group, we would like to thank Bernie for his commitment, and wish him well in his retirement."





Contact details over the festive period

We have provided you with some information on how you can get in touch with services across Plymouth in case you would like to contact them yourself.

Alternatively, please speak with your Housing with Support Officer for more information or support.

Need to talk?

Age UK Advice Line

Open every day including Christmas, providing answers and reassurance to older people who have no one else to turn to. Call free on 0800 678 1602 - 8am to 7pm.

The Silver Line

A free helpline for older people 0800 470 8090 every day 24/7.

Red Cross - Coronavirus support line

Feeling lonely? Need practical help? Call free and confidentially, 10am to 6pm every day 0808 196 3651.

Time to Talk

Aims to improve well-being for people with a disability or who are deaf, by reducing loneliness and isolation. 0300 303 3691 (free phone) or text them on 0785 642 6940 during their opening hours or leave a message and they should get back to you.

Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday - 10am - 4pm Open until midday on Christmas Eve and then open from Tuesday 5 January at 10am.

The Samaritans 24/7 Call free on 116 123

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Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

You can call the CALM on 0800 58 58 58 (5pm-midnight every day) if you are struggling and need to talk.

Seasonal vaccinations and winter health

Covid-19 is unfortunately still with us, and it is important that you take measures to help you, and your neighbours, to stay safe. If you catch Covid-19, please let your Housing with Support Officer know, and they may suggest that you do not use communal areas in your scheme while you have the infection.

There are some things you can do to help yourself stay well in winter. This includes getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccinations

It's important to get your seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations if you're at higher risk of getting seriously ill from these illnesses.

You may be able to get the NHS flu and COVID-19 vaccines if you:

- Are aged 65 or over (or will be 65 by 31 March 2024)
- · Have certain health conditions or a learning disability
- Live with someone who has a weakened immune system
- · Are a carer
- Are a frontline health or social care worker
- Live in a care home



If you're eligible for an NHS flu vaccine, you can:

- · Contact your GP surgery to book an appointment
- Find a pharmacy that offers NHS flu vaccination
- · Book a flu vaccination appointment online or in the NHS app

If you're eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, you can:

- Book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment online through the national booking service
- Go to a walk-in COVID-19 vaccination site

Speak to your Housing with Support Officer if you need help booking your vaccines, or can't get to your appointment and they will be able to help you.



Many fires are avoidable if you follow a few simple rules: Do not leave your cooker unattended Report all broken switches, sockets and light fittings to your Housing with Support Officer Turn off and unplug all electrical items not designed to be left on Lit cigarettes, cigars and pipes should not be left unattended Always put candles on a heat resistant surface in a proper holder Do not dry or air clothes near heaters, cookers or open fires Close internal doors when you retire at night Keep communal areas clear You must keep communal areas including communal rooms, foyers, stairwells and walkways, free of obstacles. This is because anything left in these areas could: Slow people down from being able to escape, especially if they are disabled, have poor eyesight or there is smoke which will cause reduced visibility.

Catch fire and emit smoke

- Stop firefighters from safely moving around to safely deal with emergency or rescue
- Please ensure you keep your communal room / areas tidy.

Mobility Scooter storage

If you have a mobility scooter you will normally store and charge it in your property. Due to our clear corridors policy, you must not store mobility scooters in any communal areas or in the hallways.

Some Sheltered Housing schemes have dedicated charging rooms, where scooters can be charged and stored away from other properties.

Mini Heaters

Please exercise caution when using mini heaters. Always make sure to purchase products with a British Standard and CE Mark and avoid placing anything near heaters. Please remember to switch off the heaters at night.

IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT TO DO TO PREVENT FIRES AND WHAT TO DO IF ONE SHOULD BREAK OUT IN YOUR HOME.

Seasonal fire safety

Christmas is a special time for celebration and should not end in tragedy because of the extra hazards that are present at this time of year.

Christmas lights



Use battery powered lights where possible



If electric lights are used, check the fuses are the right type



Do not leave fairy lights on when you go out or when you go to sleep



Do not let the bulbs touch anything that can burn easily, like paper



Decorations



Decorations made of light tissue paper or cardboard burn easily



Do not attach them to lights or heaters



Do not put them immediately above or around the fireplace



Keep them away from candles

Please speak to your Housing with Support Officer if you would like to put decorations in your communal room, and there is a seasonal decoration policy in place to provide extra guidance.

Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service offer home safety visits which will provide you with free advice about staying safe in your home.

To book a free home safety visit, please speak to your Housing with Support Officer or call 0800 7311 822.

For more information about safety in your home, please speak to your Housing with Support Officer or visit our website:

www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/yourhome/help-and-advice/safety-in-your-home

SIGN UP TO MYPCH



Use MyPCH to quickly and easliy check and pay your rent, report a repair and update your contact details anywhere, anytime.

mypch.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

We're always keen to hear what you're up to, so if you'd like to tell us about something we can include in one of our publications, we'd love to hear it.

Email news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

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