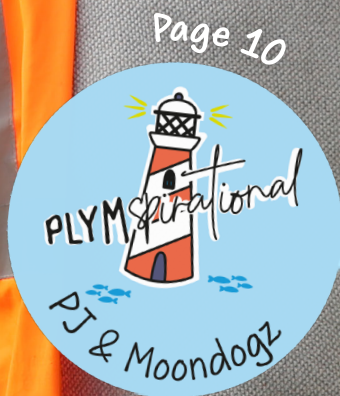


# InTouch

Issue 57 Winter 2024



Read InTouch  
online



**PCH secures first affordable homes in Ivybridge - page 8**

**Where's Cowie? - page 14**

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# Welcome to the Winter edition of InTouch.

We would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy 2024.

In this edition, we recognise those residents who are committed to supporting their community, and who go the extra mile to look out for those around them. If you would like us to showcase your neighbour, family member or friend, please do get in touch.

With the cold weather looming, we want to make sure that you stay safe in your home and on page four, we share our top five tips - with more information available in the Winter Ready section on our website.

The New Year is a great time to make positive changes or take on new challenges, and within this magazine you'll find information about the free training scheme we offer, Learn for Free.

On page five, we take a look at Plymouth's Wellbeing Hubs, and focus on The Rees Centre in Plympton, one of Plymouth's first family hubs, which provides information and advice for people of all ages.

Our new Chief Executive Jonathan Cowie has spent a lot of time out and about in the community since he joined us, meeting residents, staff and local organisations.

Many of you have commented on how often you've seen him out in the community, so on page 14 and 15 we have created a map to show you exactly where he has been so far.

On page seven we share some great news about the opening of a new St Luke's Hospice Plymouth charity shop at The Beacon. They are open six days a week, so be sure to pay them a visit, and refresh yourself with a trip to The Beacon Café.

Finally, be sure to check out our Plymspirational interview with an individual who has overcome great difficulties in his life, and in helping himself, has discovered he can help others by setting up his own mental health charity, which has just been awarded a positive sum of money by the National Lottery Fund. Keep up the good work, PJ!

We hope you enjoy the magazine,



*Valerie*

**Valerie Lee,**  
Chair of the Board

## Rent statements are going digital

A project to digitise our quarterly InTouch newsletter has already proved very popular, and almost 50% of residents are now signed up to our portal MyPCH so they can manage their tenancies, pay their rent, check their balance or report a repair online.

We are working to do even more for the environment and further reduce our carbon footprint and the next step will be providing rent statements online, rather than posting out print copies each quarter.

MyPCH gives residents the opportunity to view and/or download a statement of their rent account at any time. The MyPCH resident portal is currently being rebuilt with a new, much improved platform able to offer residents a wealth of new features and functionality.

We will always give residents access to our services in the way they want – so while we provide our services digitally by design, access will always be by resident

choice. We are happy to continue to provide printed quarterly rent statements to those residents who prefer to receive one in a paper copy.

If residents want to continue receiving quarterly print rent statements in the post, please phone 0800 028 0350 or email [rent.enquiries@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:rent.enquiries@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)





# Resident recognition

## Resident is recognised by 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 spirit, and for supporting her neighbours in the scheme, and 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 for her neighbours, and those who are connected to Helen Fox House. She is known to be instrumental in the scheme by her neighbours, 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 given an award as a Highly Commended finalist.

**Janet said:** "I have hosted weekly bingo sessions for many years now, and I enjoy seeing my neighbours and getting them out and about for a few hours to have some 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."

### **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."



## 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.

Despite entering into retirement, in his free time, Bernie 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. 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."



# Fire safety in the home

**It's still cold out and winter is a time to take extra steps to ensure you stay safe in your home.**

With Christmas just over, some of us may have some new electronic gadgets and gifts as well, so it's important to make sure you read the instructions properly and use equipment in the correct way.

Here's our top five safety tips this winter – and you can read more about Fire Safety on our website, where we have a special 'Winter Ready' section full of helpful advice.



**All mobile devices, tablets, vapes, e-cigs, e-scooters and e-bikes have lithium batteries which can be especially dangerous – make sure you read the safety instructions carefully and dispose of any items safely**



**Keep anything flammable away from sources of heat – candles and curtains are a notoriously dangerous mixture, but also make sure not to dry clothes on electric heaters**



**Don't overload plug sockets – it seems easy to put extra plugs into an extension lead, but make sure you're not overpowering the socket or using anything that is damaged**



**Be safe when cooking – if you're rushing to put together something to eat, a carelessly draped tea towel could catch fire from the hob. Be organised and tidy when cooking and make sure you turn everything off afterwards**



**Know your escape routes and evacuation plan – if there's a fire in your home, what's the safest and quickest way out? If you live in a flat, what's the evacuation procedure? Familiarise yourself with these so that in the event of an emergency, you know what to do and don't panic.**



Scan to find  
out more

Free courses  
for PCH  
residents

## New year, new goals!

**Are you looking to learn new skills or meet new people this year?**

Learn for Free is a free training programme for PCH residents, leaseholders, shared owners and household members who may be looking to gain a new skill or work towards a qualification.

Types of courses available include: Food safety, first aid, cooking skills, learning how to run a resident group, digital skills, and much more.

Find out more at [www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](http://www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk) or call 0808 230 6500 and ask for Ashleigh Knowles.



# Plymouth Wellbeing Hubs

Based throughout Plymouth, the Wellbeing Hubs make it easier for you to access information about local health and community services.

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

There are a number of Wellbeing Hubs located near many of our homes and Sheltered Housing Schemes.

These include:

- St Budeaux and Barne Barton Wellbeing Hub
- Four Greens Wellbeing Hub - Whitleigh
- Jan Cutting Healthy Living Centre – North Prospect
- Mannamead Wellbeing Hub
- Mount Gould Wellbeing Hub - Age UK Plymouth's William and Patricia Venton Centre
- Rees Centre Wellbeing Hub – Plympton
- The Elm Centre – Estover

## Rees Centre Wellbeing Hub

In this edition of InTouch, we wanted to introduce you to the Rees Centre Wellbeing and Family Hub, located in the centre of Plympton, close to the Hillcrest development and our Plympton Sheltered Housing Scheme.

Kathryn Hussey, Project Coordinator at The Rees Centre Wellbeing Hub, wanted to tell you more about the hub in Plympton.

**Kathryn said:** “The Rees Centre is led by Barnardo’s, a national children’s charity, and is one of Plymouth’s first family hubs, providing information, advice and support for people of all ages, with a specialism for children, young people and families.

“The centre holds a place in the heart of many of the Plympton community, with many residents having fond memories of their time here over the years and we are hoping to make new connections with members of the local community and PCH residents.

“There are a number of services that are run from the centre, and there are groups led by local people and volunteers who give up their time to support others. We run activities that are inclusive and accessible for all, and we are currently trying to extend our offer to include the weekend.

“By people being able to get involved with things locally, it helps them to meet new people and get more support in their neighbourhood and make their connections with their neighbours rather than having to rely on city wide services.

“Our doors are open for everybody and we look forward to supporting PCH residents in the future.”

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) and Livewell Southwest, one of the region’s biggest providers of health and social care, are working in partnership to help improve the lives of people across the city.



Rachael Fox, Partnership Project Manager, often supports events at Plymouth’s Wellbeing Hubs, and signposts our residents to their local Hub for support.

**Rachael said:** “Within Plymouth Community Homes’ partnership with Livewell Southwest, we aim to find new ways to support the health and wellbeing of our residents.

“The Wellbeing Hubs and other organisations in the community play a key role in supporting local residents and we are keen to work more closely with the Hubs, run events together, and make sure residents know about services and support in their area.”

“At the end of September, staff from PCH attended a Wellbeing Session at The Rees Centre alongside One You Plymouth and Food is Fun CIC, and it was really great to meet our residents in Plympton.”

To find out more information about a Wellbeing Hub near you, visit the individual Wellbeing Hub websites or speak to your Housing Officer.

**The Rees Centre Wellbeing Centre team are available to help, and are open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.**

**Contact number: 01752 340550**

**Email: [RCWBH@Barnardos.org.uk](mailto:RCWBH@Barnardos.org.uk)**

# Plymouth Community Homes Sales Team

Plymouth Community Homes has a dedicated sales team, who look after our shared ownership sales, Right to Buy, Right to Acquire and open market sales.

The team can help guide you through the sales process and answer any questions you might have.



## Shared ownership

The shared ownership scheme is backed by the Government and makes buying a home more affordable and achievable if you cannot afford to buy a home on the open market. You buy a share of between 10% and 75% of the full property value and pay rent to us for the remaining unsold share.



## Shared ownership staircasing

If you have purchased your home through shared ownership, you can buy more shares - and in most cases, you can staircase to 100% ownership where you would become the freeholder, and no longer a leaseholder if your home is a house.

If you staircase to 100% for a flat/ coach house, you will continue to be a leaseholder. In some locations, there are restrictions on staircasing to maximum of 80%.



## Shared ownership resale

The team helps PCH shared ownership leaseholders with marketing and selling properties if they decide to move on. In accordance with your lease, our staff can help to find you a buyer within a 4-8 week period, however if they cannot find you a buyer you can choose to market your home with an estate agent.

The sales team advertises all shared ownership homes through the sales brand, SO-Living and their dedicated website, [so-living.co.uk](https://so-living.co.uk)



## Open Market

PCH also sells new homes on the open market. Please visit the PCH website, [plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](https://plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk) for more information.



## Right to Acquire

If you have been a social housing tenant continually for more than three years, you may be eligible to buy your home under this Government-backed scheme, which offers you a set discount (as of 2023, this is £9,000) off the open market value of your home, subject to qualifying criteria. If you want to find out more about Right to Acquire, please visit our website.



## Preserved Right to Buy

If you were a Plymouth City Council tenant and transferred to us in November 2009 when PCH was formed, and you have remained living in a PCH property since, you might be eligible to buy your home under the Preserved Right to Buy scheme, subject to qualifying criteria.

You may receive a discount on the value of your home depending on the length of your tenancy with us. If you want to find out more about Right to Buy, please visit our website.



## Right to Shared Ownership

Some new build homes offer the right to purchase the home through shared ownership. The amount of homes eligible for this are currently limited and to qualify, you would need to have lived in the property for 12 months and been a qualifying tenant for 3 years before applying.

You can contact the sales team on 0800 077 8748. Email [so-living@pch.co.uk](mailto:so-living@pch.co.uk) for more information about shared ownership, or for information on Right to Buy or Right to Acquire, contact [righttobuy@pch.co.uk](mailto:righttobuy@pch.co.uk)

For more information about all Government-backed home ownership schemes, visit [www.ownyourhome.gov.uk](https://www.ownyourhome.gov.uk)





## St Luke's shop opens in The Beacon

**St Luke's Hospice Plymouth has opened its latest shop at The Beacon in the heart of North Prospect.**

The Beacon, PCH's dedicated community centre, already houses the local library, a café, office space, the LARK Children's Centre and a convenience store, as well as a space that can be hired for meetings and community events, and three floors of residential accommodation.

The shop will sell pre-loved clothing for women, men and children, shoes and accessories, jewellery, soft furnishings, household items and bric-a-brac, and is accepting donated items.

**John Saunders, St Luke's Area Retail Manager, said:** "Connecting with local people and communities is central to everything we do at St Luke's, so it's a real thrill to move into North Prospect, especially as part of an established neighbourhood environment like The Beacon.

"I know our care teams are often out and about in North Prospect, visiting patients and their families, so it seems appropriate that we now have a shop here in the heart of the community, and we hope it will be well supported."

**Nicola Kingston, Interim Head of Income, Commercial & Homeownership at Plymouth Community Homes said:** "It is really exciting to be joined by an organisation whose core values align so closely with PCH, which will continue to grow the offering to our residents and community in North Prospect.

"We are excited to welcome St Luke's to The Beacon, and they will no doubt be a popular and welcome addition to the local community and beyond."

Run by staff and volunteers, the shop will be open six days a week, Monday to Saturday. There is a parking area at the back of the building if anyone has a large number of items to donate at one time. Please enquire in the store for more details.





# Plymouth Community Homes secures first affordable homes in Ivybridge

**Plymouth Community Homes will be delivering more affordable homes in the South Hams after securing eight energy-efficient homes in Ivybridge.**

PCH has purchased eight two-bedroom homes within the Filham Chase development in Ivybridge, their first homes in this desirable area, which will be made available for affordable rent and shared ownership.

Of the eight homes, two will be offered for affordable rent and six homes will be made available for shared ownership purchase through our sales brand SO Living.

The homes will be prioritised to those with a local connection to the area to meet the specific needs of the community, which has been made possible thanks to the support from key partner, South Hams District Council.

The Filham Chase development is being built by Bloor Homes and is located close to Ivybridge town centre, with great access routes to the A38 and local primary and secondary schools.

The new homes will benefit from solar panels, an increasingly popular energy efficiency feature, helping residents benefit from cost savings on their energy bills. There is also an opportunity for PCH to acquire a further seven homes at Filham Chase early next year, subject to additionality homes grant funding from key partner, Homes England.

**Gavin Sutton, Senior Project Manager at PCH, said:**

“Filham Chase will be Plymouth Community Homes’ first project with Bloor Homes, and we are delighted with the standard of homes they have created. The properties will provide much needed affordable housing for the South Hams, in an idyllic location, very close to Dartmoor National Park.

“I hope that this is partnership just the beginning, and Bloor Homes and PCH will be able to work together on other schemes going forward.

“We would like to thank South Hams District Council for their support with the Section 106 planning requirement and Homes England for their grant funding support.”

**Ken Allen, Group Director of Partnerships at Bloor Homes, said:** “We have not worked with Plymouth Community Homes previously but have been very impressed with the way they have progressed matters and moved the opportunity quickly to contract.

“Bloor Homes have been building a strong portfolio of new home developments around Devon and Cornwall, through our regional office based in Exeter. The site at Ivybridge is well underway and the first completed affordable homes on this phase are expected to hand over to Plymouth Community Homes in a few weeks’ time. We hope this new relationship will continue and enable us to work together again on other Bloor Homes sites in the region.”

The first affordable homes to be offered for rent or shared ownership sale through PCH will be available in early 2024.

For more information or to register an interest in one of the shared ownership homes, visit the SO Living website.







## Affordable homes development in Plymouth given green light

Plans for an eco-friendly new neighbourhood in the heart of Plymouth city centre which will create 136 affordable homes for local people to rent and buy have been approved.

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) has been awarded full planning permission from Plymouth City Council to develop land off Bath Street in the Millbay regeneration area and deliver much-needed new affordable homes for social rent and shared ownership purchase.

There will be 86 homes made available for social rent by local people in housing need, with 54 offered for shared ownership purchase through PCH's sales brand SO Living, and four commercial units made available for lease.

Construction on the first phase is expected to start next spring. The initial section to be completed will deliver 51 homes for social rent and 29 for shared ownership.

## New affordable homes coming to Saltash



Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) will be delivering more shared ownership homes for local people in Saltash after appointing a new contractor for the Churchtown Farm development set to complete in spring 2024.

Within the scheme there will be five homes made available for shared ownership purchase through its sales brand SO Living, including a two bedroom flat, and two and three bedroom houses. Shared ownership is a government-backed scheme which helps people to get onto the housing ladder by buying a share of a home, and paying a low-cost rent on the remaining share.

**Claire Baldry, Project Manager at PCH, said:** "These five new homes will provide low-cost home ownership options for people looking to join the housing ladder."

**Nick Marsden, Affordable Housing Manager at Cornwall Council, said:** "This development has had its challenges, but with strong collaboration with PCH and Saltash Parish Council we are now a step closer to the five shared ownership homes on this site being completed and ready to house those in need."

To register your interest, please visit the SO Living website or call the team on 0800 0778 748.





## Plymspirational: PJ and Moondogz

**PCH resident PJ has overcome great difficulties in his own life - and in helping himself, he discovered he was able to help others by setting up his own mental health charity, Moondogz.**

PJ has just been awarded £10,000 by the National Lottery Fund to help finance his work with his mental health charity.

His remarkable rise to mental health champion came about after PJ experienced a troubled background, which he takes us through in his own words.

“I think it’s fair to say I’ve been through a lot of struggles with my mental health,” PJ said. “As a child I was in and out of care a lot, I’m a sexual abuse survivor, and it led me down the path of drink and drugs, which became an addiction I had to battle against.

“Most of this was against the background of an unstable home life, and when I was older, I started to sleep on the streets. I ended up in Norwich, sleeping rough and just surviving enough to make sure I could get my hands on enough drink and drugs to self-medicate. It was only 16 years later when I came back to Plymouth that things started to change for me, but there was still a long path in front of me.

“Norwich Council wrote to Plymouth City Council, who were able to offer me accommodation and it was around that time that I met my wife, Hannah. I didn’t open up to her for the first two years - we had children and although I was able to function a lot better, that didn’t mean my mental health was cured, I still struggled to the point that sometimes I’d just have to get out of the house; I didn’t want my kids to see me struggling. It’s not me – it’s my mental health that’s the problem.

“For years I was on waiting lists and saw people but I spent so long trying to be seen and heard, the system itself is broken and not really fit for purpose sometimes when people need it. There’s nowhere near enough

support out there and I was fed up of it, so I decided it was time to do something about it myself and make a change. I decided I can’t change my past, I can only change my future.

“I’m your typical Swilly boy and the water is my life. When I was younger I used to do a bit of kayaking and enjoyed that so I decided to take that up, which was no mean feat in itself. I saved for three months for my first kayak, and it took me four months to get myself out there, but when I managed to get out on the water I figured this was exactly what I needed.

“It’s calm and peaceful and when you’re out there, the only thing you have to worry about is staying afloat. That’s when I thought about starting Moondogz and inviting other people out with me as a place to talk and open up.”

PJ has now been clean of drink and drugs for 16 years and Moondogz has gone from strength to strength, encouraging clients with mental health struggles to





get out on the water. Working in partnership with local counselling service Hidden Lives, PJ has helped to change the lives of those who have engaged with their services – so much so that the Job Centre often refers people to PJ and his team.

Everyone at Moondogz and Hidden Lives work together to make a real, tangible difference in the lives of those they help. With a 24/7 support line on offer, and services available for people experiencing mental health breakdowns, PJ credits their success to their human touch.

He said: “I work alongside Alex Mitchell, a Director of Moondogz who came to us a few years back with his own troubles. I think being a typical Janner and having been through lots of struggles throughout my life, it helps people feel safe and able to open up and talk to us. We’re there when they can’t find the support they need elsewhere, we can empathise with what they’re going through.

“We help people to step out of their comfort zone and challenge their mental health head-on, and provide them with support and a range of services to help.”

**“There’s nowhere near enough support out there and I was fed up of it, so I decided it was time to do something about it myself and make a change.”**

PJ cites a stable home and family life with his wife Hannah and his children as being the foundation for him to achieve what he has.

“I’ve got a big family and there’s a lot of love there. A few years ago we moved into a new home in North Prospect which PCH helped us with, and we haven’t looked back since.

“I’ve learned that life is short, that at times we all need help, and that’s what I want to provide for people. The system doesn’t work for some people, due to waiting times or lack of support. Just know that there are qualified people here who can help.

“Down-to-earth people who have lived real experiences. You’re never alone.”

PJ runs Moondogz with Directors Alex Mitchell and Chris Holden, and in partnership with Laura-Anne Mervyn, a counsellor at Hidden Lives, and Managing Director of at the Wellbeing Café located on Exeter Street.

You can follow the  
Facebook page for  
Moondogz here



## Men’s Shed AGM 2023

### In September the Janner Men’s Shed held its AGM.

The Janner Men’s Shed is part of the social inclusion and community engagement movement that realises the value of people working together on practical woodworking tasks. It was set up in 2017, and continues to be supported by Plymouth Community Homes and the Communities team.

During the meeting, the group appointed a new Committee, and the Chair gave an account of the past year’s work, alongside new proposals about how the club should be run.

The group is made up of 26 males and females and they were joined at the AGM by Louise Turner, Head of Property, Safety and Environmental Services at PCH, who gave an inspirational talk.



Louise said: “It was an absolute privilege and pleasure to meet with The Janner Men’s Shed and Ryan.

“The value that PCH adds to the life of the group is really clear, in that their wellbeing, sense of belonging and friendships that they develop is immeasurable and invaluable, and I am so proud that we are part of it.

“I want to say how grateful and thankful I am for the work Ryan does with The Janner Men’s Shed. Having now met them all, and seeing him in action, I am really humbled and in awe of the difference he’s making in their lives.”

Ryan Huws, Communities Worker at PCH, said: “We had a very successful AGM with 26 Sheddors in attendance. It was a delight to be joined by Louise Turner who gave us an inspirational talk. All the Sheddors thoroughly enjoyed her anecdotes and insights”.

# You said, we did: Strategic Business Plan

Every quarter we look at areas where residents have asked us to improve our services, and review what has changed as a result as one of our priorities is to know and listen to our customers. Here we report back on some of the things that have changed since we introduce our new Business Plan.

Our Business Plan sets out our mission and vision for the next five years:

Mission: A high-quality affordable home for everyone

Vision: Providing homes and communities where people want to live

We're concentrating on our top five priorities in the next 12 months:

- To maintain and improve our homes and buildings
- To value our people
- To know and listen to our customers
- To deliver outstanding services for residents
- Increase the number, type and tenure of our homes to meet a growing need for affordable housing

**You said:** Whilst repairs satisfaction has remained high at 96.23%, you told us our repairs response times have reduced and need to improve.

## We Did:

We looked into this and found the response times had fallen due to vacancies, sickness levels, contractor prices and high repairs volumes. We are relaunching a new set of service standards for our repairs service so

you know what to expect from us and can hold us to account if we don't meet those standards. Alongside this we are updating our Repairs Policy, which is in draft format ready for resident consultation early next year.

**You said:** You asked us to look at our voids process which manages empty homes so they can be relet to new tenants, and to give residents more decoration choice when moving into their homes. This also offers an opportunity for us to save money by not decorating rooms which would then be changed by a new resident.

## We Did:

We launched new Voids Letting Standards which have positive impacts for residents, and have helped us achieve high satisfaction levels at 95% - as well as providing an average cost saving of between £800 - £1000 per home which we can reinvest into other areas of the business.

Anecdotally residents have told us they have enjoyed having a choice of decoration with comments like: "I consider myself extremely lucky." "Never seen anything like it, 10/10."

We've also started an Any Day Lettings approach which was brought in following a successful trial. Two tenancies were able to start on the day of being signed up rather than having to wait until the following Monday. The two trial lettings saved a total of seven days between them in turnaround times, which improved our turnaround time for lettings and no issues or negative feedback arose because of the changes. This will further aid a reduction in turnaround time for lettings. We are going to continue monitoring the impact of Any Day Lettings going forward.



# Damp and Disrepair Team

In the last edition we introduced you to Sean Watson, our new Damp and Disrepair Manager, who will be heading up a new specialist department focused on managing damp and disrepair cases. This new team is part of ongoing commitment to taking a zero-tolerance, proactive approach to dealing with incidents of damp and mould in residents' homes.

Sean has now added two Damp and Disrepair Supervisors to complete his team, with Steven Price and Brian Condron moving into the new roles, and they're looking forward to getting started. **Steven said:** "I'm excited to be part of the new Damp and Disrepair Team and I'm looking forward to have more face-to-face time

with residents to help them with damp and mould issues and help them to stay safe and warm in their homes."

**Brian said:** "As part of the Damp and Disrepair Team, we'll be using our collective experience and skills to help eliminate mould from people's homes – our most important priority is keeping residents comfortable in their homes, and that's what we'll try and do."

If you have concerns about damp or mould, or think that a persistent issue may be caused from water outside leaking into your home, please contact your Housing Officer or call us on **0808 230 6500** so an appointment can be made for a visit from one of our specialist damp officers.

## Universal Credit Managed Migration

Universal Credit Managed Migration is the transferring of claimants in receipt of legacy benefits to Universal Credit. The legacy benefits include:

- Income based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit

Some areas of the country have already started the migration process and Plymouth/Devon is due to start from **8 January 2024**.

The first people that will be sent a Managed Migration Notice are people in receipt of Tax Credits only with no other legacy benefits – this could be Child Tax Credit and or Working Tax Credits.

### What to look out for

You will receive a 'Universal Credit Migration Notice' letter through the post from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Tax Credit claimants will receive this letter from the DWP with a HMRC logo on it.

**This notice letter is important as it will tell you that your existing benefits are stopping, and you need to make a claim for Universal Credit.** It will also tell you what you need to do and by when.



You may have had a leaflet telling you to get ready for Universal Credit – if the leaflet you get doesn't have a deadline on it, it isn't your migration notice.

**Wait until you receive your migration notice before making your application,** because if you are worse off on Universal Credit and you apply before you get your migration notice, you will not receive any Transitional Financial Protection.

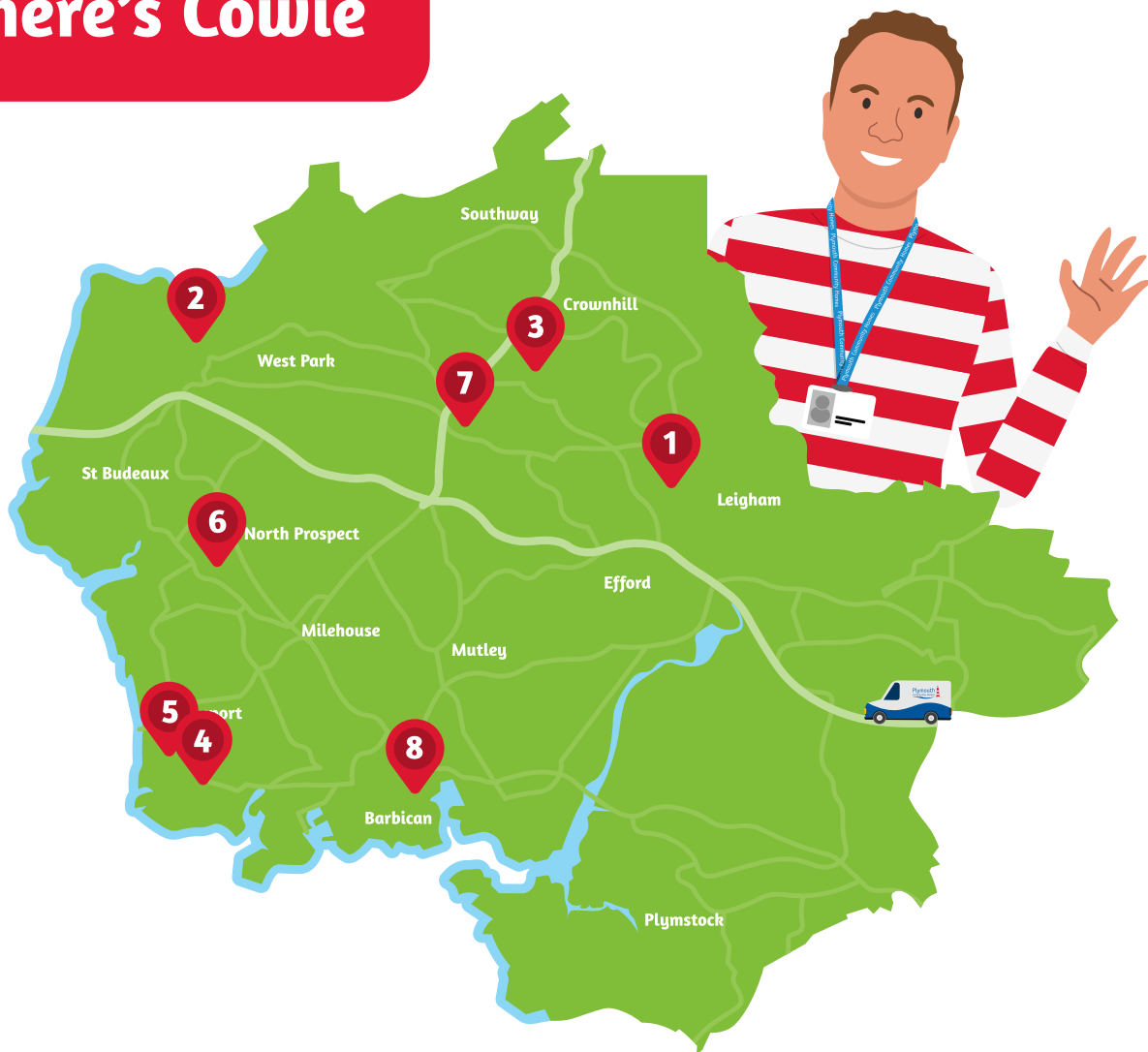
If you are unsure of what to do or whether you have received a migration notice or not, please call our Financial Inclusion and Income Recovery team on **0800 0280350** who will be happy to help you.

### 2024 – 2025 Financial Year

The next financial year runs from 1 April 2024 to 6 April 2025 which means that it will be a 53-week rent year.

Universal Credit does not take 53 week rent years into consideration when calculating the housing costs element which means that **if you are in receipt of Universal Credit, the payments you receive for your rent over the year will be short of one week which will be your responsibility to make up.** To do this we recommend that you pay the extra week over the year so that it is easier to manage. If you have any queries concerning this, please contact our Financial Inclusion and Income Recovery team on **0800 0280350**.

# Where's Cowie



Our new Chief Executive Jonathan Cowie has been very busy since he started with us, and has spent a lot of time out and about meeting as many residents and staff as he can, visiting community groups, clubs and local organisations. Our residents have commented on how often they've seen Jonathan out in the community – so we've put together a map to show you exactly where he has been, and let us know if you've seen him yourself.

## 1 Men's Shed

Jonathan met 20 members of the Men's Shed – a community initiative we support that is run by PCH Community Worker Ryan Huws, which acts as a support network for men alongside teaching them some new skills.



## 2 Damp and Disrepair: Scrutiny Group Tour

Jonathan joined Sean Watson, our Damp and Disrepair Manager, and residents Joanne Bowden and Mel Gallagher who were inspecting homes as part of their resident Scrutiny review on how we handle damp and mould, which will feed back suggested improvements to our Customer Focus Committee.





### 3 Stores

Jonathan visited our Stores, which is where we keep all of the parts and tools our operatives need to complete their repairs, as well as PPE equipment and other essential equipment.



### 4 Cllrs, MPs and Plymouth City Council

Jonathan has been out on the estates with Area Housing Manager Fran Sandercock, had meetings with Plymouth MP Johnny Mercer, MP Luke Pollard, and met with the housing lead at Plymouth City Council to discuss how can we help to build more homes and reduce homelessness, alongside attending PCH Board sessions.



### 5 Voids

Jonathan was keen to see more of our homes, particularly empty homes being prepared to be relet – which we call 'voids'. This process involves teams working to get an empty home up to the required standard for a new resident to move in, as well as our Housing Choices department who manage the viewings of our empty homes with prospective residents.



### 6 Devonport

Jonathan was spotted out and about in Devonport having visited Marlborough House and the Mount Wise Towers, and then popped by to see resident Leroy who had just come from the Towers resident breakfast club.

### 7 Livewell Southwest

Jonathan met with our partners Livewell Southwest who we're working in partnership with to support residents to live healthy lifestyles and work on preventative measures to protect their health.

### 8 Barbican – Environmental Services

Jonathan was spotted with our grass cutting teams down at the Barbican on a beautiful day to find out first-hand some of the challenges involved in looking after our estates.



Jonathan will continue to be out and about on our estates to meet as many of you as possible, so keep an eye out, say hello as he would be delighted to speak to you, and you can send us your pics as you spot Mr Cowie out and about.

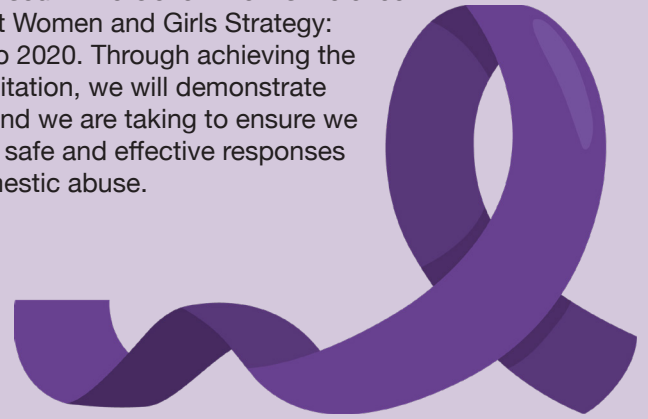
# Our commitment to domestic abuse

Plymouth Community Homes is committed to achieving the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation, which will showcase our dedication to embedding the standards of good practice for responding to domestic abuse within the organisation and beyond.

PCH has an internal steering group with representatives from different departments across the organisation who lead on providing necessary domestic abuse support and guidance to residents and staff. The group has been collaborating to work towards the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to cases of domestic abuse and over the next few months we are entering into the next milestone of this journey to achieve our certification.

## Who are DAHA?

DAHA are the only project in the UK offering a domestic abuse accreditation for the housing sector, being recognised in the Government's Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: 2016 to 2020. Through achieving the accreditation, we will demonstrate the stand we are taking to ensure we deliver safe and effective responses to domestic abuse.



## Help with the Cost-of-Living Crisis

The cost-of-living crisis is adding pressure on struggling households in Plymouth and across the country.

Plymouth City Council has created a Cost-of-Living Hub with information and advice to support people and direct them to available 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 about benefits to 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.

You can access the hub by visiting:  
[plymouth.gov.uk/cost-living](http://plymouth.gov.uk/cost-living)

### How we can help

Plymouth Community Homes knows 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 staff 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.

### 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:

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





# New Head of Service Q&As



## Ian Howse - Head of Repairs

Ian has recently joined Plymouth Community Homes as our new Head of Repairs, providing management and leadership to a range of operational services teams who deliver services for our tenants.

### Tell us a little bit about yourself

I grew up in Bristol, and left school at 16 to carry out an apprenticeship with Cardiff City Football club until I was released in 1998. My main interests are keeping active through various sports, long walks with my Border Collie and spending quality time with my family.

### What is your experience in the industry?

After completing my football apprenticeship, I joined my family decorating business. Several years later,

I attended further education and achieved qualifications in Building Studies whilst taking up an Assistant Site Managers role for a regional construction company.

After 10 years in the commercial sector, I joined Sanctuary Housing Group as an Operations Manager in 2012 advancing to National Head of Service for Maintenance in 2015 holding this position until my appointment with PCH.

### Why Plymouth Community Homes?

I wanted to join Plymouth Community Homes as it is a great opportunity to work for a forward thinking and well-established housing association that puts their customers at the centre of everything they do.

**“An opportunity to work in Plymouth and the surrounding areas where I live was a huge influence on my decision to join Plymouth Community Homes.”**



## Laura Haynes - Head of Asset Strategy and Delivery

Laura joined Plymouth Community Homes in September 2023 to lead, plan and oversee delivery of our asset management service, which includes the improvements we make to our homes and buildings. Laura's role is focused on ensuring value for money as well as supporting the business objectives and customer need.

### Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I have a strong moral compass (probably to my detriment at times) and a I'm bit of a workaholic!

### What is your experience?

I started off volunteering for a housing association whilst studying surveying at University. My first role was at DCHA, which is now Livewest, and I've worked across the social housing and public sector for over 25 years.

### Why PCH? And how are you finding it being a new Head of Service within the organisation?

Why not PCH! It's an incredible organisation, full of passionate staff who get to work in a fantastic city.

### What do you enjoy about Plymouth & the surrounding area?

I've lived here for over 25 years and wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

### What do you get up to outside of work?

My passion is being outdoors, being active and learning new things. I'm happily married, a proud mother of two (adult) children, and three very spoilt dogs.

# How we listened and improved

At Plymouth Community Homes we strive to deliver the best services we can for our residents, but we know that sometimes things can go wrong, and we welcome complaints as it can help us to put things right and improve the way we work.

Most complaints are effectively resolved at Stage 1 of our complaints process however complaints can be escalated if a resident remains dissatisfied.

Every year we look at four key pieces of information which can indicate areas where we can improve when it comes to enabling and supporting residents to make a complaint, and providing an accessible complaints process:

## Amount of complaints

Have the number of complaints increased? How are we performing against other similar sized social housing providers?

## Nature of complaint

Are complaints focused on certain areas of the business and do we need to look at these areas if there are more complaints than in other areas?

## Outcome

Have the resident and PCH managed to come to a solution, was the complaint upheld and what was the result?

## Lessons learned

What could we have done differently or what can we change to improve our services to residents?

Here are some examples of feedback we've received in the last 12 months, how we've listened and what we've done differently as a result:

### How we listened

Sometimes residents need to report a leak during out of hours, which can result in their lights being temporarily disconnected until the repair can be fixed. Our 'out of hours' contractors should supply emergency lighting to enable our residents have some light until we can attend. However, on one occasion we were unable to get hold of the contractors to action this task, leaving a resident without lighting.

### What we did

We have now ensured our own 'in house' electrical team have access to temporary lighting, especially for residents that need emergency lighting during repairs outside of normal hours.

### Learning and improvement

We resolved the complaint and improved our customer service by ensuring emergency lighting is now always available to leave to our residents.

### How we listened

Some residents were home for their repair and didn't hear us at the door, which resulted in a missed appointment.

### What we did

We discussed this with our operatives and looked at our processes to find out what we could do to reduce

the number of missed appointments by ensuring we do what we can to alert the resident that we have arrived.

### Learning and improvement

Operatives will try to phone the customer if there is no answer at the door, and if this doesn't work we'll contact our office and asked them to try our resident on the numbers they have available, before leaving a card to ask the resident to get in contact with us.

### How we listened

Operatives are asked to take photos before and after they make any repairs to ensure we have a record of the work carried out, and for any insurance purposes. Several operatives mentioned that working outside in difficult conditions makes it difficult to take pictures or damages their tablet.

### What we did

We reviewed the equipment that our operatives use.

### Learning and improvement

Operatives were issued with robust waterproof and damage proof tablets to carry out their work and ensure we have a record of what has been carried out.



Below are the number of Stage 1 complaints we've received over the last 3 years and how many have progressed to Stage 2.

Stage 1				Stage 2			
	2020/21	2020/21	2020/21		2020/21	2020/21	2020/21
Q1	41	70	88	Q1	1	7	3
Q2	62	77	97	Q2	4	5	4
Q3	55	70	127	Q3	4	2	6
Q4	78	82	122	Q4	4	5	11
Total	236	299	434	Total	13	19	24

## Protecting your personal data

At PCH we are committed to ensuring that your privacy is protected, and your personal data is kept safe and secure. This means that we must protect your information from being misused by any third parties for fraud, such as phishing scams and identity theft.

We embed information security into our everyday interactions with our residents, including when you call our Contact Centre. We control access to your information by asking questions to check your identity, and by doing this, we can be sure we are talking to the right person. However, we do understand that it can be frustrating having to answer questions every time you call us.

You can also contact us using MyPCH online self-service portal. MyPCH lets you access your PCH rent account, make an online payment, report a repair, update your contact details and make a comment or complaint online.

You can access this portal 24 hours a day from your computer, tablet or phone. Find out more about signing up to MyPCH from our website.

If you would like to find out more about why we collect personal information, how we use it and who we may share it with, you can view our Tenant Privacy Notice on our website. Please contact your Housing Officer or call our Contact Centre if you would prefer to receive a paper copy or an easy read version.

Our privacy information may be amended occasionally to reflect changes in legislation, or if there are changes to the services that we provide. You can keep up to date with the changes by reviewing our privacy information on a regular basis.

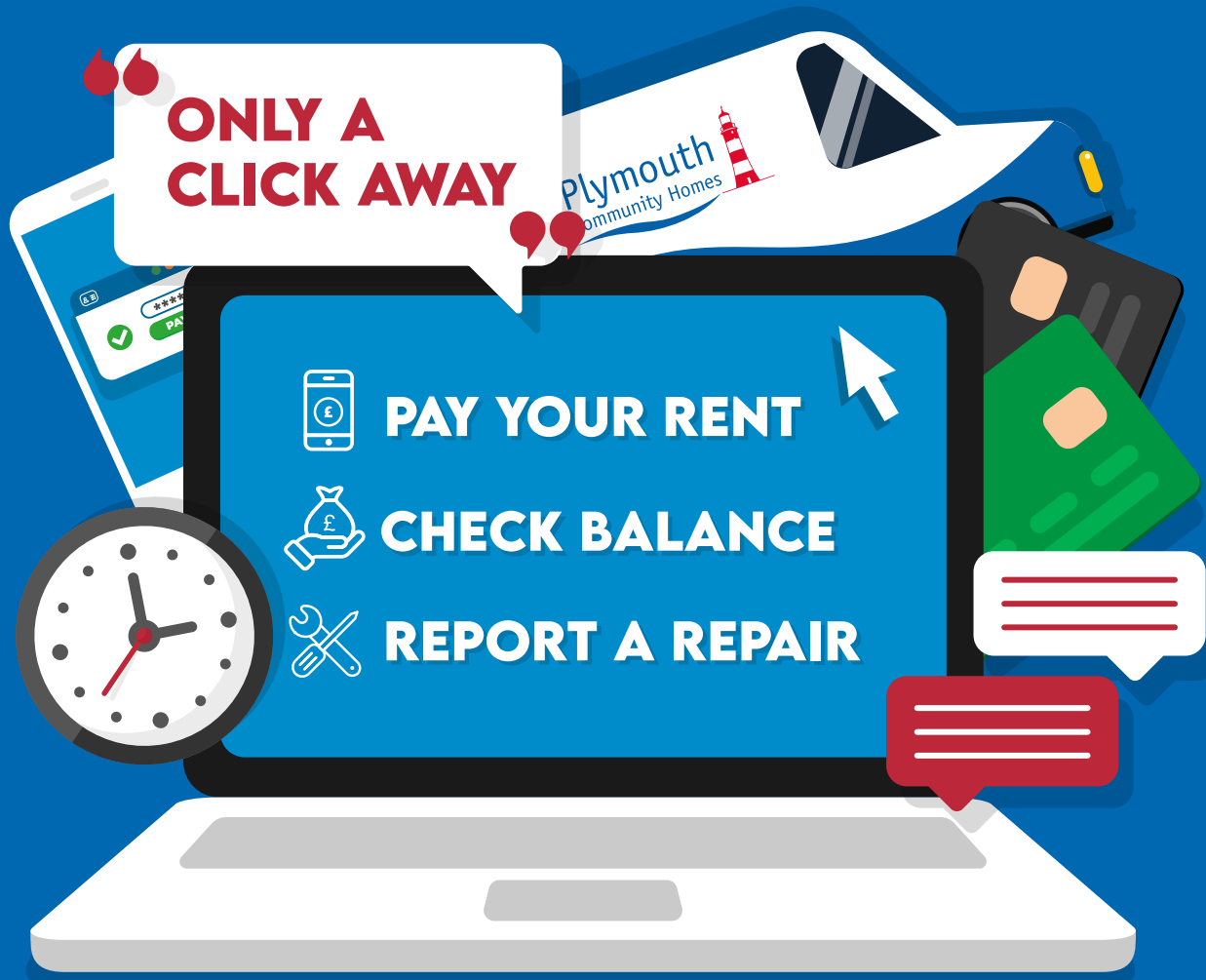
You can send any queries to the PCH Data Protection Officer by emailing [governance@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:governance@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk) or by writing to our Plumer House office.



Sign up  
to MyPCH



# SIGN UP TO MYPCH



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

**[mypch.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](http://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](mailto:news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)

## Plymouth Community Homes

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[www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](http://www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)



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