

# Talkback

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Summer 2024

## Volunteering in action

### George from Whites Meadow shares his volunteering experiences



George fell on hard times and found himself homeless. He ended up in temporary accommodation and felt that he needed to do something to turn his life around and improve his mental health.

George spotted the Ellenor Hospice shop across the road and signed up to volunteer. Everyone was so kind and helpful, and even gave him things for his home and invited him over at Christmas. He was with them for three years,

*“ Volunteering is really good for my mental health. I get to mix with different people – socialise – and it gives structure to my day. It’s a great feeling to be able to help others too.”*

until he found himself at Whites Meadow in a new home. He also volunteered for St Mary’s Church in Greenhithe.

George was helped by Christchurch Foodbank in Orpington. They offer fresh, chilled and frozen food and no vouchers are required. Anything that can no longer be offered through their ‘Open Kitchen’ is donated to Foal Farm for animal feed. If you are in need of food, have donations to give, or want to offer your time as a volunteer, please phone Liesel Stanbridge on 07511 876928, or email her at [liesel@ccorpington.org](mailto:liesel@ccorpington.org)

We spent some time with George at the Petts Wood branch of St Christopher’s, where he has been volunteering since he got his home

with Keniston. His Nan used to volunteer for them and, in her later years, was given help and support from St Christopher’s during her illness.

The store was having a vintage fair when we turned up and George was kept busy manning the stall along with his colleagues. They had a wonderful selection of goods on sale that they had selected especially for the event.

St Christopher’s hospice was founded by Dame Cicely Saunders in 1967. They provide care and support for people across the London boroughs of Bromley Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and

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Southwark, and have 24 high street shops staffed mainly by volunteers. At the Petts Wood store, they are really proud of their volunteers, who work hard raising funds all year round. Their volunteers range in age from 17 to 94, with some volunteers giving over 40 years of support. Last month they chose George as their champion for his hard work and dedication.

George said: "I absolutely love it there. It's like one big family. Everyone is so supportive and good to me.

"Everything I have in my new home has been obtained through charity shops, like my John Lewis sofa and my beautiful crystal candlesticks. I like to upcycle items and never knew that I could be so creative. I love my home and my neighbours are so friendly. I have never lived anywhere so nice. Whites Meadow is a beautiful place"

To volunteer for St Christopher's, there are various opportunities available; from roles supporting patient care and out in the community, to volunteering in their shops or helping out at a fundraising event. Check online at [www.stchristophers.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities](http://www.stchristophers.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities), call 020 8768 4669, or email [volunteering@stchristophers.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@stchristophers.org.uk)

# Rent increase for 2024-25

**By now, you should have had your rent increase letter with all the details of the 7.7% increase.**

We know that any rent increase will be unwelcome. But like other housing associations, our operating costs have increased significantly. This past financial year, we spent over a third of our rental income on repairs and maintenance, and over a third on planned works.

The Board took the difficult decision to make this increase so that we can continue to provide services to a good standard and to invest in good quality homes.

Government rules set a cap on the level of increase, linked to the



level of inflation (using the Consumer Price Index measure). This year the increase is above current inflation, but last year it was below inflation – so the real cost evens out over time.

Please contact your Rent Income Officer as early as possible if you need help to pay your rent. There is also advice and support available from your local Citizens Advice Bureau or StepChange, the debt advice charity.

## Complaints update

**We continue to receive a low number of formal complaints – with just three so far this year (April-June 2024).**

All these cases were about housing management and none were upheld.

Since 1 April 2024, we have been legally obliged to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Service's latest Complaints Handling Code.

Our Board member responsible for complaints is Stephen Hoad. He makes sure the Board gets regular complaints details and he reviews them before each quarterly Board meeting.

### How to complain

You can complain by email, phone or letter, meet us face to face, use our social media or the contact form on our website. Or you can call the office to ask for a form – on paper or by email. If at any stage you aren't happy with our responses, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service:

- Online at: [www.housingombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://www.housingombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint)
- Email: [info@housingombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housingombudsman.org.uk)
- Phone: 0300 111 3000
- Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Check our website for our complaints performance and service improvement report for 2023-24, along with the Board's response. You can also contact us for more details about our complaints process.



# Better homes, better neighbourhoods

Our better homes, better neighbourhoods fund has been used to brighten up two of our schemes in recent months.



## Blooming at the Bickley estate

In our last edition, we showed you the new Bickley flowerbeds. They have now bloomed and are looking fabulous (see above). Well done to the gardener for all his hard work.

## Neat work at Nethewode Court

The bank at the front of Nethewode Court was looking overgrown and untidy. It was being used as a rubbish dumping area by passers-by.

We started by getting the whole area cleared. We filled 18 refuse bags with litter, which included a car seat, clothing and scaffolding clips, to name a

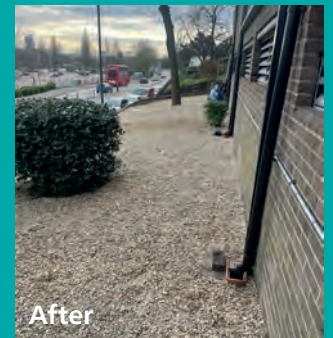
few of the items. We also got 17 large bulk bags of green waste removed.

Once this was done, we laid 18 jumbo bulk bags of 20mm shingle. Shingle improved the appearance of the bank and we hope it will deter people from leaving rubbish. We know from experience that when an area looks neat and tidy, people walking past are less likely to throw in their rubbish. We have seen this work well at Silver Court.

If you have any improvement ideas for where you live, please tell us. You can join us on a walkabout, or you can speak to your Housing Officer.



Before



After

# Making the most of your summer

We recently held summer socials at **Merrow Street** and **Foxley Hall**. It was nice to see residents join us for a spot of food and music. Pictured below are the winners of our 'Guess the cake weight' and 'Guess the marbles' competitions.

When we had an active residents' group at **Darrick Wood**, they did lots of fundraising. As a result, we had leftover funds to spend on some summer coach trips. Darrick Wood sheltered residents have just been on a trip to Hastings

and our general needs residents will be off to Southend very soon.

If you would like to start your own residents' group, please talk to Lynn Russ, our Engagement & Communications Officer.



# Board member profile: Andrew Pert

## We recently caught up with Board member Andrew Pert.

Andrew has spent the last 20 years working in the housing sector as an auditor. He is also on the Board of another housing association, so he has an excellent understanding of how associations are managed.

### How has it been so far?

Andrew told us: "I've been on the Keniston Board since January. I've found it interesting and have been enjoying the experience. I have observed that the Board is really well governed, and I plan to visit the different schemes and to meet some residents in the near future."

### What brought you to us?

Andrew said that he was looking to the future and considering taking on more non-executive roles. Keniston's advert came at just the right time. "I liked the idea of working with a smaller

organisation that has more direct contact with its residents.

"I wanted to stay within the housing sector and make a positive contribution. Keniston looked like a great organisation to be involved with."

### What is your biggest achievement to date?

Andrew told us: "I used to carry out audits of secondary schools and once uncovered a major fraud at one of these schools. The fraud discovery was just under £1 million.

"As the primary witness, I was required to be involved in a lengthy court case which resulted in a five-year prison sentence for the perpetrator. As an auditor, being part of successful prosecution was a huge achievement."



### Do you have interests outside of work?

Andrew said: "I enjoy watching football with family and have been a big fan of Charlton Athletic for many years. I am also a keen cyclist, belonging to riding clubs. I once did a charity ride from Glasgow to London, which was 500 miles over five days."

## Smaller, caring, big enough to make a difference

Keniston's latest Strategic Plan has now been published on our website.

Our new plan sets out our vision for what we aim to achieve over the next three years.

It gives our overall goals and our priorities as a smaller provider of affordable housing.

We have updated our values and our key drivers are:

- Equality, diversity & inclusion
- Quality and a long-term vision
- Risk & viability
- Modernisation and smarter working

**Strategic Plan 2024-27**

**Introduction**

Our new strategic plan sets out our vision for what we are seeking to achieve over the next three years. It sets out our overall goals and our priorities as a smaller provider of affordable housing.

**Our ethos the key drivers**

Defining our core values and the values that impact on our business and our residents. It sets out our vision for what we are seeking to achieve over the next three years. It sets out our overall goals and our priorities as a smaller provider of affordable housing.

**Equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI)**

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a core value of our organisation. We are committed to ensuring that all our residents and staff have the opportunity to participate fully in our organisation and to benefit from the services we provide.

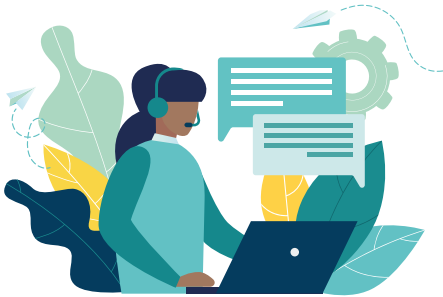
**Strategic plan themes**

The specific aims of our plan are grouped within three key themes: Homes and communities, Customer experience, and Our people.

We don't distribute copies of the plan to everyone individually, but if tell us you would like a paper copy, we can get some printed.

# Acuity survey: more results

We have continued to work on the Acuity survey results and have now summarised all the feedback you gave us.



We are now using the survey results to help shape future estate action plans. At residents' meetings, we have also been sharing our findings for where you live.

Over the past few months, we have been phoning or emailing some of you, to follow up directly on any comments or issues you raised. If you didn't put your name on the survey, we have taken note of what you have said and taken action where needed.

## Estate issues

Using your survey feedback, we have been taking action to make numerous improvements. Here are some examples:

- At **Merrow Street**, you told us about the poor maintenance of communal areas. We terminated the cleaning contract and employed a new caretaker.
- At **Burnhill House**, you told us that anti-social behaviour was still a major concern. We have now successfully evicted a tenant for this behaviour.
- At **Foxley Hall**, you told us that the estate was in decline due to constant fly-tipping. We installed a CCTV camera, and this has proved to be an effective deterrent.
- At **Sunningdale Court**, you told us that the gardening was

not up to standard. We are currently retendering to recruit new gardeners.

## Damp and mould

In all, 35 of you reported having problems with damp and mould. We have been getting in touch with people about this and have so far organised 15 property inspections. Seven residents said they were dealing with the issue themselves and managing it well. If you have a damp or mould issue that you can't manage and you need advice, please contact our Property Services team.



## Service charges

We took note of your comments on service charges. They included:

*"Service charges vary every year. Some idea of what is coming in the next year could help us budget for it – particularly for those of us on fixed incomes and with today's inflation."*

*"Put the amenities price down."*

We review your service charges annually, following rules set by our regulator. At all our rented schemes except for Bickley, our service charges are 'variable' and may change from year to year.



Leaseholder service charges are set in line with legislation and the terms of your lease.

## Energy efficiency

One resident advised:

*"Investing in the housing stock they already have and improving efficiency in their properties."*

We make sure that when we are replacing major items in our properties, we keep energy efficiency in mind.

We have recently completed energy performance assessments. We will add any improvements needed to our major works programmes over the next few years. Our homes have to meet the Government's target of an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C by 2030.



## Thank you

We are continuing to work on the survey results. Thank you again for giving us your honest feedback.

## Starters and leavers

We said farewell to Marvelle Dublin, who has moved on to new pastures.

Simone Bailey (pictured) has now completed her term with the Board, and we thank her for all her work.



We have recently welcomed two new members, Simon Hague and Marcia Gillings.

## Our rules about rubbish

With the exception of your normal refuse on collection days, you must not leave any rubbish outside of your property.

This includes furniture, mattresses, electrical items and any other bulky item that you are disposing of.

If you have arranged a collection by the Council or another provider, you must tell us in advance and not place your items outside until the actual day of collection. Thank you for your co-operation.



## Obituary: Jonathan Mavunga

**Some of you will know Jonathan Mavunga as the caretaker and cleaner at Darrick Wood. He had also worked at Tarling Close.**

Jonathan worked for Keniston for 16 years in all. During that time, he made a huge contribution to keeping our schemes clean, tidy and pleasant places to live – and always with a cheerful and willing manner.

We know that Jonathan's work

was appreciated by many residents, and we have been touched by the many messages of appreciation we've received from Darrick Wood residents since hearing the news of his passing.

We have shared their cards and condolences with the family.

It was a privilege to have Jonathan as part of the Keniston team and we shall be working on a suitable memorial for him soon.



"One of the first people I met when I moved in, always very friendly, helpful and just a thoroughly lovely gentleman."

"Jonathan was a lovely man, always smiling and cheerful. He always said 'hello' and had time for a quick chat. He will be sadly missed."

"He was one of the happiest cheerful souls, who was always so lovely."

## Don't forget your neighbours

The summer holidays are here, and we want your children to be enjoying their time outside.

However, we must ask you and your children to be considerate to your neighbours and keep noise to a minimum.

### No leather footballs, please

Remember that we do not allow leather footballs at any of our schemes. They can cause damage to property and make more noise when used. Please use a foam or plastic football instead.



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