MAGAZINE







Reach is a great way for you to find out more fulfilling our vision of "Improving people's lives".

In this issue you can find out more about how we are building new homes for older people in the borough. You can also read how we are supporting 'Keep Widnes Tidy': meet one of our apprentices, view our new estate walkabout programme and much more!

As your landlord, we want to make sure that we are accountable to you. We are working hard to improve our services and have made changes in response to your views. You can read more about some of the changes on page 11.

We hope you enjoy reading Reach. If there's something going on in your neighbourhood, or if you would like to feature in the next edition, drop the Communications team a message at communications@haltonhousing.org.



Meet our

apprentice

Top hygiene

bistros

rating for our



Supporting national shared ownership campaign



We're listening & making changes



Who's knockin' at your door?

Colleagues complete CIH course Garden competition



Money matters



Managing condensation mould & damp





New homes for Halton's ageing population

> New community hub opens - Telephone survey



involved









Our money advice teams recently helped one of our customers who was struggling with her health and finances, to receive a back payment of over £11,000!

Our customer lives with long term health issues and as a result, is often in and out of hospital due to her debilitating condition.

Through the persistence of the team, they built a good rapport with the lady and over time they encouraged her to engage with them.

The lady hadn't been getting the full Universal Credit for many months.

Knowing something wasn't right, our welfare teams stepped in to support the customer. Without their probing questions and intervention, this may never have been identified and awarded. With persistence and hard work, the team not only got the lady a whopping backpay of £11,147.08, but also a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) for an under-occupancy deduction.

The customer has the means to pay her rent arrears and move to a smaller property, which is life-changing for her, to know that in her illness she is financially secure and can provide for her and her daughter.

See our 'Money Matters' feature on **page 15** for help managing your finances.





New programme for 2020!

Following the fantastic response to the re-introduction of estate walkabouts in 2019, we are delighted to share our new **2020** programme.

Walkabouts are your chance to talk to us about your neighbourhood. You can meet our staff, and tell us about issues like anti-social behaviour and environmental improvements. We're often joined by our partners including council ward members and Cheshire Police. We'd love you to get involved and join us. We don't want to be on our own!



Walkabout Dates 2020

Full programme & routes available on our website

Grange Estate (a)

9th April Start at Grangeway Shops 9:50am

Grange Estate (b)

7th May Start at Rowan Close 9:50am

Russell Road Area

4th June Start at Russell Road Shops 9:50am

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Halton Lodge

2nd July Start at Halton Lodge Shops 4:50pm

Castle Rise

30th July Start at Castle Rise Shops 9:50am

Stenhills Crescent Area/ Runcorn/Preston Brook, Moore

24th September Start at Corner of Stenhills Crescent/Picton Road 9:50am

9:50a



MeetOur. Housing Apprentice Darcy

Having never had an interest in a career in housing before, Darcy, 20, was hooked after completing a placement at Halton Housing.

After completing her GCSEs, Darcy completed college courses in Public Services and Travel and Tourism. However, when apprenticeship opportunities at Halton Housing came up, Darcy couldn't resist applying.

"I had never taken any interest in housing previously but I was super intrigued by the idea of learning more following my placement. Once I found out there was an apprentice role I decided to apply".

Darcy joined Halton Housing in September 2018, and is currently working with the Housing Options team undertaking a variety of tasks including supporting the team, booking appointments for post tenancy visits, converting tenancies from starter to assured and dealing with general day to day enquiries.

Apprenticeships

To sample a flavour of the multiple roles at Halton, Darcy has had the opportunity to move around a number of teams and areas. This has included three months with the planning team and three months with Open Door, Halton Housing's commercial subsidiary, where she supported the sales team preparing homes to be handed over to customers.

Alongside working at Halton Housing, Darcy is studying a Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) level 3 housing qualification, delivered by Halton Housing's CIH qualification partner, Dutton Fisher.

Darcy is enjoying her time as an apprentice and the variety of tasks and work she has undertaken.

"I like the style of working and how different it is to any job I have ever had. I hope to continue my career in Housing once I complete my apprenticeship in the summer hopefully within Halton Housing. Maybe even stick to the role I'm in now".

Gaining skills and being able to utilise them straight away is why Darcy encourages others to look at doing an apprenticeship.

"Apprenticeships are great. It not only gives you skills within whatever job you may be doing but also gives you something to feel proud of at the end. Even if you don't want to carry on with the same

iob in the future you will have always gained something from it!" Tophygiene Rating for our bistros

Our bistros at Naughton Fields and Barkla Fields extra care schemes in Widnes have both achieved a hygiene rating of 5, the highest possible.

The rating follows recent inspections and reflects the high standards of food hygiene found by food safety officers from Halton Borough Council.

The Olive Tree Bistro at
Naughton Fields and The
Orange Tree Bistro at Barkla
Fields offer freshly made meals,
snacks and a selection of hot and
cold drinks. They are both open to
the public, Monday - Friday from
10.00am - 3.00pm. Why not try our
delightful bistros next time
you're passing?







benefit from the support of our Helping Hands initiative, whether it's a refurb of a scout hut, or a hospice garden in need of some TLC, get in touch for an application form by emailing

'Keep Widnes Tidy' carried out volunteers' who are dedicated to picking up litter where they live. If you run a community-based project that could helpinghands@haltonhousing.org.



Supporting a National Shared Ownership campaign

Shared Ownership is a fantastic way for people to get on to the property ladder and we're delighted to be supporting a new national campaign for it, alongside Open Door.

Shared Ownership is another way to buy a new home. You buy a percentage and pay rent on the rest. The remaining shares are owned by a Housing Association. However, as you're living there, you can decorate it to your tastes. and you decide when to purchase more shares or when to sell. Buying a percentage means a smaller deposit and smaller mortgage. It's a first step on the ladder for lots of people. Usually, you can also carry on buying shares, to own 100% of your home.

Open Door is the brand for all Halton Housing's Shared Ownership homes.

Open Door have a dedicated friendly Sales team handling a wide range of housing products including Outright Sale, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy. The team will talk you through options, all with a view to getting customers into home ownership.

npen door

Rob Poole. Managing Director said:

"Open Door is delighted to be working with the National Housing Federation to promote the benefits of Shared Ownership to a wider audience and help give it the profile it deserves. We have a variety of homes available for sale in the borough of Halton and look forward to the continued development of Shared Ownership homes in the future".

"Shared Ownership is a great option for first-time buyers, growing families looking for a bigger home and anyone looking for an affordable way to get a foot on the property ladder."

To find out more about our shared ownership homes visit www.opendoor-properties.co.uk. Or, for more information on the wider campaign visit https://sharedownership.net/

'Keep Widnes Tidy' was set up seven years ago

and brings the community together to tidy-up.

and green-up Widnes by organising litter picks.



We're not had been you're not!

Over the past 18 months we have been listening to you to find out how we can improve our services. To do this, we need to understand what you want so we can personalise services to meet your needs.

Customers highlighted a number of frustations when dealing with us. Using this insight and turning it into action, we are starting to make some changes for the better.

We're Listening & making changes for the better...

These are just a handful of changes we have made to improve the services we deliver for you. We'll be introducing even more changes for the better over the next 12 months and will ensure you are kept up to date every step of the way.

Getting through to us on the phone

Long call wait times and not getting through to the right person was a significant pain point for customers. The telephone experience was also the biggest driver associated with customer's perception of ease of use of our services

Our Repairs Service

Over 59% of customers said that repairs was the most important service to them and was also their biggest driver of dissatisfaction with

We have made some major improvements to our repairs service. We have seen a 65% improvement in customers having their repair logged within our target completion time of 20 days for routine repairs. We are now completing repairs right first time on average 86% of the time. Further improvements are planned, like making better use of materials carried on our vans. This will help us get repairs right first time to deliver a more efficient and effective service, whilst providing value for money for our customers.

Since April 2019, we have made a number of changes to improve your telephone experience with us. The longest call wait times have reduced by 84% and our average wait time for your calls to be answered has reduced by almost 2 minutes, with calls now answered on average within 32 seconds. We have also increased the number of colleagues in our customer services team, made efficiency changes to how your calls are handled by our advisors and also examended apsects of our takes telephone system.

Reception Area

Customers said there's no one to speak to on reception at Waterfront Point.

We worked with customers to improve our front of house experience and now have a dedicated member of staff available Monday to Friday from 9am – 5pm. Since introducing this last year, 94% of visitors rated their experience as good.

Getting Involved

It's been highlighted that many of our engagement events and activities take place during the day, meaning many of our customers can't attend or get involved. This was particularly highlighted for our estate walkabouts.

For our 2020 estate walkabout programme, we have introduced some evening dates. This will help even more of you to join us.



Someone's KINOCKIN at your door... but do you know who it is?

Most callers are genuine but sometimes people turn up unannounced, intending to trick their way into your home.

They are known as 'distraction burglars' or 'bogus callers'. Their only aim is to steal money or valuables. You should always be wary when someone you don't know comes to the doorstep.

Bogus callers may be smartly dressed and claim to be from us, the council, the police, health organisations or gas, water and electricity companies.

Remember the following simple rules:

Lock, Stop, Chain & Check!

Lock- keep front and back doors locked. even when at home. Bogus callers often work in pairs. One of them will try to keep you talking at the front door while the other tries to get in through the back door or a window.

Stop - before you answer, stop and ask whether you are expecting anyone. Check that you have locked any back door and removed the key. Look through a spyhole or window to see who it is. Don't let any caller pressure you into making a quick decision - if you are unsure, do not open the door.

⇔Chain-if you decide to open the door, put the chain or bar on first. Keep it on while you talk to the visitor on the doorstep. However, when the door is genuine caller will shut and locked, you should leave the bar or chain off in case you need to get out in an emergency.

Check - check their details before you let them into your home. A not mind if you leave them on the doorstep and close the door while you confirm their identity, even if it is raining.

Our staff always carry proof of ID too. If you're ever in doubt - then contact us.



Four colleagues from our Customer Team are celebrating after completing their Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) level 4

qualification.

Senior Tenancy Support Officer, Amanda Hogarty, Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Officer, Sarah Goulding, Anti-social Behaviour Officer, Lisa Temperley and Starter Tenancy Officer, Kelle McShane all completed their level 4 qualification following hard work and dedication over the past 18 months.

Kathryn Davies, Learning and Development officer at Halton Housing said: "We are fully committed to empowering our colleagues. Studying for a CIH qualification means staff are competent housing professionals and equips

them add value and ensure the best possible experience and service is delivered to customers."

> In December last year, 8 staff members celebrated completing CIH level 3 qualifications.

Chartered Institute of Housing





Take a fresh look at your finances with these tips from our Welfare Benefit & Money Advice team!

Budget Planning

When it comes to getting back control of your budget, you need to plan. Our interactive budget calculator is a great way to do this. Visit our website to check out the calculator.

Are you receiving all the benefits you are entitled to claim?

Over £20 billion is unclaimed in means-tested benefits in the UK. Whether you are working, on a low income, sick, disabled or retired you may not always be getting, or be aware of, all the Welfare Benefits you may be entitled to. This is especially true of Universal Credit, which is a benefit that working-age people can claim to supplement their income whether they are in work, unwaged, sick or disabled.

Fee-free basic bank accounts

Did you know you can have a basic bank account that does not charge any fees? You can use a fee-free basic bank account to receive money and pay bills and use a debit card, but they will not allow you to use an overdraft. Visit

www.moneyadviceservice.org .uk to find one.

Help to Save

Did you know you can boost your savings without having to pay any more? Are you receiving any of the following:

- Working Tax Credit
- Entitled to Working Tax credit and receiving Child Tax Credit
- Claiming Universal Credit and your household earned £569.22 or more from paid work in your last monthly assessment period

If so, then opening a 'Help to Save' account is for you, as it allows you to get a bonus of 50p for every £1 you save over 4 years. You can save between £1 and £50 (monthly limit) each calendar month but you do not have to pay money in every month. Search 'Help to Save' to find out more.

Heating your home

Do you think you are paying too much for your energy?
Struggling with high energy bills? The Save Energy Advice Line offers lots of advice on switching, help to pay your bills, warm home discounts and other energy-saving information.
Call them on

0800 043 0151 or visit www.energyadviceline.org.uk.

Struggling to pay your water bill

United Utilities offer various schemes to help support those in financial hardship to manage water debts or support to pay their ongoing water bills.
Call **0800 072 6765** or visit www.unitedutilities.com.

Help for Halton Housing customers

If you're a Halton Housing customer and struggling to manage your finances, budgeting issues or just want to make sure you are receiving the correct benefits, why not get in touch with the Welfare Benefits Money Advice team. You can contact us via the Welfare button on the Halton Housing App, by emailing welfare@halton

housing.org or by calling 07801 548205.

> Jeanette Gustafson (Senior Welfare Benefits & Money Advice Officer)



Condensation is the biggest cause of all damp and mould problems reported to us.

It's caused when warm air hits a cold surface like a window or a wall. Mould can occur if a surface is left wet. You'll see a build-up in condensation when you cook, shower or dry clothes indoors.

Top tips

What can I do to reduce condensation and mould? The best thing is make sure air can circulate around your home, so open windows or use an extractor fan. If there's condensation around your windows you can wipe this off too.

Condensation in the kitchen

If you minimise the moisture you'll reduce condensation, so:

- Keep pan lids on when cooking
- Use an extractor fan
- Close the kitchen door

Condensation in the bathroom

Running water in baths or showers causes clouds of moisture, so:

- Open a window
- Use an extractor fan
- Keep the door closed

When drying clothes

Drying a pile of washing can release as much as 10 pints of moisture into the air, so:

- Dry washing outdoors when you can
- Try not to pile wet washing onto radiators
- Dry clothes in the bathroom with the window open and the extractor fan on

Treating mould patches

- Wipe areas down with a fungicidal (mould killing) wash
- Then redecorate with a fungicidal paint
- Dry clean mildewed furnishings and shampoo mouldy carpets
- Consider using a dehumidifier



Be aware of

Cuckooing

Our Anti-social Behaviour and Tenancy Enforcement teams are working alongside Cheshire Police to raise awareness of 'Cuckooing' and help bring perpetrators to justice.

We recently forced entry into an address in Ditton following reports from a vulnerable customer that their flat was being used for drug and criminal activity. One male was arrested for possession with intent to supply drugs and theft of a bike.

Stories like this are on the rise locally and nationally. Known as 'cuckooing', it is where drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person to use it as a base for dealing. Just like a Cuckoo, the dealer moves in, takes over the property and turns it into a drugs den.

Victims of 'cuckooing' are often drug users but can include older people, those suffering from mental or physical health problems, female sex

> workers, single mums and those living in poverty. Victims may suffer from other forms of addiction, such as

alcoholism, and are often already known to the police. Dealers often approach the victim offering free drugs to use their home for dealing.

Anyone who suspects 'cuckooing' is taking place is urged to contact the ASB team on 0303 3330101 or Cheshire Police on 101. Alternatively, customers can report information anonymously to

We want to reassure our customers that we are working with our partners Cheshire Police to tackle the ongoing issue of cuckooing. We will act on any reports of this type of criminal activity taking place in our customers' homes. Sharon Morris

Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**.

(Tenancy Services Manager)

Cuckooing signs to look out for:

- More people than normal going into someone's house
- People calling in at all times of day and night
- Different cars pulling up outside the house and not staying long
- Strangers who block off the doors and windows to the house
- If you haven't seen your neighbour for a while.



CrimeStoppers.

Speak up. Stay safe. 0800 555 111.



Homes for Halton's ageing population

Did you know...

The number of older people in Halton is expected to grow by 10,000 in the coming years. We're helping to address this future housing need.

Plans for our new 100-apartment extra care scheme in Sandymoor were approved in December 2019.

The scheme, which will be named 'Hazlehurst' is part of a wider development at Hatters Chase by Vistry Partnerships, to build 235 homes in Sandymoor. The scheme will benefit from high-quality communal facilities including communal lounge, multi-purpose room and a public bistro, promoting social interactions between residents and the general public with the aspiration to create a cohesive community in the area.

Hazlehurst will be our third extra care scheme following the hugely successful Barkla Fields and Naughton Fields schemes in Widnes. Hazlrhurst will help address the future housing need for older people in Halton, which is expected to grow by 10,000 in the coming years.

"Hazlehurst will be a high quality, mixed-tenure scheme that provides the latest extra care allowing customers to live independently in their own homes. As well as the new homes, the project will also create jobs and other opportunities for the community of Sandymoor."

Our extra care schemes offer an alternative to those who feel their existing accommodation doesn't meet their needs, or if they are feeling isolated or lonely. Customers can access help to support independence, while enjoying peace of mind and security.

Paul Mullane
Director of
Development
& Growth

one-bedroom apartments 52 two-bedroom 44 apartments two-bedroom for affordable apartments for shared ownership Hazlehurst is named after homas Hazlehurst, a busines thomas Hazlehurst, a busines thomas Hazlehurst & soap & alkali manufacturing company, manufacturing company, Hazlehurst & sons in Runcorn. open door Sales of Shared Ownership apartments at Sandymoor will be managed by Open Door - the brand for all Halton Housing's Shared ownership, Full sales information will be made available soon at www.opendoor-properties.co.uk

Nightstop's New Community **Hub Opens**

Nightstop's new Community Hub 'The Way Forward', in partnership with Halton Housing recently opened its doors.

We're supporting the Nightstop Hub by providing the shop, and a garage for storage purposes.

'The Way Forward' Hub is a community space located at 108a Royal Avenue in Widnes, and is very much 'in the community, for the community', providing Mental Health support and community and inclusion initiatives. The Hub will also offer food provisions, for those most in need.

'The Way Forward' is open Mon-Fri, 9am -5pm and runs a range of services from emergency accommodation and counselling, to mediation and training. Any residents in the borough can use the hub, and they do not charge.

Any Halton Housing customers in need can access items from the Hub, but our Tenancy Support Services, and Welfare Benefits team also access items for their cases.

How can you get involved?

The Nightstop Hub are always appealing for customers/residents to donate items of none perishable food, household items, curtains, clothing. fumiture, bedding, kitchen appliances, cutlery, crockery and furnishings (Nightstop pat test items that are donated).



Items can be dropped off at the hub itself on Royal Avenue, or if it is larger items of furniture, Nightstop can collect.

If you, or anyone in your community would benefit from the services which Nightstop offers, why not go along or call 0151 345 6454 to find out more information.



Involvement **Opportunities!**

Customer

Telephone



It's really important to us to ask customers about their thoughts and experiences of the services that

To do this, we are working with an external research company called 'Voluntas' who will be ringing a random sample of customers to ask some key questions about what is important to them. We will be using the information collected to shape our services and make them more accessible to you.

Voluntas are fully GDPR compliant and have only numbers. Voluntas will not on pass any data to a 3rd party so it is completely safe and legal.

either let Voluntas know during the call or contact us and we'll make sure that their details are removed





Every one of our customers has the opportunity to get involved, and we are keen to support you to make this happen. We want to empower you to play an informed and active role in decision making at Halton Housing. We're committed to ensuring that the customer voice is heard and listened to.

There are many ways to get involved and make difference to the services we provide now and in the future. This could be on a formal or informal basis, regularly or just now and then. working alone or as part of a larger group.

Ways you can get involved include:

- Board Members
- Customer Scrutiny Panel
- Customer Forum
- Customer Inspectors
- Editorial Panel

- Street Representative
- Tenant & Resident Associations
- Estate Walkabouts
- Community Events
- Follow us on to 🖸 🛈 📵



Want to get involved?

Email: involved@ haltonhousing.org or call 07903 594 957



Got a story for Reach...

If there is something going on in your neighbourhood that you want to share, send it to communications@haltonhousing.org

Contact us







(m) @haltonhousing

Your Halton Housing
Customer Account



Live Chat



talktous@ haltonhousing.org



Tel: 0303 333 0101





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