

InTouch

Issue 58 Spring 2024

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stories online

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Welcome to the spring edition of InTouch.

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The warmer and brighter weather is very welcome as spring begins to move us on from a cold, wet winter, but please be reassured that PCH continues to take issues of damp and mould very seriously, and works to improve how we deal with reports of damp.

In this edition, you'll find information about our new triage reporting system for damp and mould as well as an update on our rents and service charges from April 2024.

At the start of April, PCH announced that it will be working with Luna's Fund for the next 12 months as our new Charity of the Year. We are delighted to be supporting a new local charity and hope to generate funds to help them following the huge £7,000 raised by staff for the Plymouth branch of the Motor Neurone Disease Association last year. Read more on page 7.

On page 8, we take a look at our Digital Inclusion Scheme which is being run in partnership with Livewell Southwest to help support residents to get online. Margaret, a local PCH resident kindly shares her story with us about how being given a tablet to book online GP appointments and to shop online has changed her life. In a slightly different feature, we put a spotlight on our recruitment and training of local people, and we wanted to share some of the success stories of our awesome apprentices. Read more on page 10.

On page 12 and 13, we introduce you to Joanne, our newest Board Member, and Tracy, our new Executive Director. We hope you enjoy getting to know them. If you

have any questions for Tracy, please send them on to your Housing Officer or email us on news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk and we will be sharing a Q&A in the next edition of InTouch.

The Beacon, our very own Community Hub in North Prospect, has plenty on offer to our residents and the local community, including a coffee shop, meeting rooms, a library, a charity shop and so much more. PCH residents living in the area have recently unveiled a meaningful mosaic at The Beacon to showcase their collaboration and close-knit community spirit. Find out more on page 14 and 15.

Our Reuse Centre collects and repurposes items from vacant properties for other residents to use. We followed the journey of some of our rehoused items, and spoke with Trevor, a resident who made good use of our Reuse Centre to get him essential white goods for his kitchen. Find out more about this service on page 16 and 17.

If you have any stories about the good work of your neighbours, or want to show us your efforts in your garden, we want to hear from you. Contact us on news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or message us on Facebook, X or Instagram.

We hope you enjoy the magazine,



Valerie

**Valerie Lee,
Chair of the Board**

New reporting system for damp and mould cases



Plymouth Community Homes has introduced a new triage reporting system to help prioritise its response to any reports of damp and mould in residents' homes.

PCH continues to take damp and mould seriously and work to improve

how the organisation responds to reports, so issues can be remedied as quickly and effectively as possible.

Last year, three new roles were created with a Damp and Disrepair Manager and two Damp and Disrepair Supervisors appointed to carry out damp and mould inspections, and ensure PCH provided the right response in a timely manner.

PCH has introduced two response timeframes for responding to residents reports of damp and mould in their properties. This is to ensure that residents who are at greater risk to the effects of damp and mould are prioritised.

Where severe case of damp and mould has been identified and health conditions can be negatively impacted, PCH will attend within 7 days to inspect the property. Where damp or mould reports are less severe, and residents are at a lesser risk of the effects of damp and mould, we will attend within 14 days to inspect the property.

By introducing a more 'risk based' inspection period, this will allow our teams to priorities more severe cases, based upon the vulnerability needs of our residents.

Sometimes, reports of damp relate to a larger-scale repair being needed – for example to a roof or leaking pipe – so it is more effective for repair operatives to be booked in first, rather than a damp and mould inspection which would then require a second appointment for the repairs team to review.

PCH has now put into place a new triage reporting system to help ensure it can meet its two response timeframes and this involves assessing, and then prioritising reports, ensuring they are sent to the right teams to speed up any required repairs and works which need to be carried out residents' homes.

Ian Howse, Head of Repairs at PCH, said: "We take damp and mould very seriously as it can have a hugely negative impact on people's health, as well as making it unpleasant and uncomfortable living in your home, and

we are doing everything we can to respond promptly and tackle issues when they are reported to us.

"We have a team of three carrying out inspections but a lot of reports flagging damp and mould actually need to go to the Repairs team for works to be booked in, so we've tried to make the reporting process more efficient to speed up the result for our residents.

"The new triage system is about aiming to increase what we know about a damp and mould case at the time the report is being made to us, so we're able to prioritise the right response, and send out the right people, to get a better outcome more quickly for residents in our homes.

"We are also prioritising a response to our most vulnerable residents, with the triage system able to highlight those

residents who have health issues or include either very young or very old people living in the property."

The Contact Centre will manage the triage process

when people call PCH about damp and mould, and the new resident portal MyPCH being developed this year will offer new functionality expected to be available later in 2024, which will enable residents to report both a repair or a case of damp and mould online, with their report triaged through an online booking form and sent to the right team.

Both the Contact Centre and MyPCH portal triage systems will assess the vulnerability of a tenant and check if residents have any medical conditions, if they have under 14s living in the property or if a resident is 65 or above, and if residents have existing skin problems, respiratory problems or a weakened immune system – all of which can create additional risks for those living in close proximity to mould.

There is information on our website about the new damp and mould reporting standards to help explain how PCH prioritises cases and responds in different time frames, from 24 hours for an urgent, category-one hazard to longer time frames for more routine repairs.

"The new triage system is about aiming to increase what we know about a damp and mould case... so we're able to prioritise the right response"

Find out more or report damp & mould:

[plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/
your-home/repairs](https://plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/your-home/repairs)



Rent and service charges from April 2024

Plymouth Community Homes has written to all our tenants this spring to let you know what the new rents and service charges will be for the year ahead.

PCH is proud to offer tenants excellent value for money, and our rents remain significantly lower than other local social housing associations, as well as all private rents.

Not for profit

As a social landlord and a not for profit community benefit organisation with no shareholders, PCH invests all money from rents back into looking after our homes and communities, and building more homes for future residents.

Some residents also pay us a service charge in addition to their social rent, which includes the cost of providing communal services like caretaking, cleaning, grounds

In fact, our social rents are amongst the lowest in England – and are at least 50% lower than the cost of renting the same property from a private landlord, while our affordable rents on newer homes are between 20 and 30% lower than if rented privately.

maintenance and, in some blocks, services like communal lighting, individual heating and TV services.

Residents living in sheltered accommodation pay a service charge which includes the cost of providing support services.

PCH does not make any profit on service charges, and only charges what it actually costs to provide those services.

Rents this year

Our rents are our main source of income to help us pay for repairs and improvements.

We set our rents using Government guidance and the inflation rate, and this year from April 2024, rent increases will be 7.7%.

This is based on the September 2023 Consumer Prices

inflation rate of 6.7% plus 1%.

The rent increases of 7.7% also apply to shared owners and those renting garages or parking spaces.

Every tenant will have received an individual letter in February explaining their own rent and service charges, and what the changes mean for them.

Service charges this year

Tenants who pay a service charge will have also received a statement to explain what their new service charges will be for the coming year.

This year, the majority of our communal service charges will be broadly staying the same. However individual heating charges will be increasing as energy costs have risen across the UK. These charges are directly passed on based on actual individual usage. While the cost of energy has started to fall, there will be an increase this year due to the

previous cost of energy being higher than estimated.

The average weekly service charge across all our homes will be increasing by 2%, and in some sheltered housing schemes, the weekly charge will increase on average by 12% due to the individual heating charges.

Our charges are also affected by the increased rate of inflation, so the cost of goods, services, and wages PCH has to pay for has gone up.

Why are my support charges changing this year?

As we explained to our sheltered housing tenants last year, the Support Charge they pay will be rising by £2 from 2024, and again every year for the next few years, as there is a significant shortfall between the amounts being paid and what it costs PCH to provide these services.

We are increasing the charges steadily to gradually close the gap, which we explained to residents in meetings

and face to face consultations last year. For those tenants who started their tenancy from April 2023 or later and who already pay the full charge, the charge will increase by £1.80 per week, which is an increase of 7.7% to cover the increase in our costs.

Here to help

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

PCH 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.

More information about how we set our rents and service charges, and the help available for tenants who

may be struggling, can be found on our website at plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/rent-or-buy/rents-and-service-charges/

Here you'll find videos explaining both processes, as well as answers to a lot of common questions.

You can also call our team on **0800 028 0350** or **(01752) 388121**.

PCH and local primary school join forces to plant trees in Flora Park Court

As part of the Urban Forest Scheme, Plymouth Community Homes is working with the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest to plant more trees in the green spaces around our homes and neighbourhoods. Our team of tree specialists along with experts from Plymouth City Council, carefully select the right trees, ensuring they are healthy and planted in suitable locations. We take measures to ensure that these trees will not cause any harm or nuisance to the surrounding area and properties, such as avoiding planting them too close to buildings and obstructing daylight.

At the start of the year, a group of motivated pupils from St Peter's Primary School joined us in a tree-planting initiative at Flora Park Court. The pupils showed great enthusiasm as they dug and planted new trees and hedging whips in the communal garden area. It was a wonderful opportunity for the pupils to learn about the environment and the importance of taking care of nature.

Marc Wheeler, Head at St Peter's Primary School said, "One of our passions as a school is supporting our children and our community to flourish. We were therefore delighted to be given the opportunity to help improve the local area by planting trees in a location that can be viewed from our school playground. The children loved

the opportunity and were excited by the fact that they were contributing to something that would still be there for years to come. One pupil even commented that it was one of the best experiences they have had and that she would visit the trees every week to watch them grow."

A local PCH resident, said, "I planted a tree nearby about 10 years ago and have enjoyed watching it grow throughout the years. It's lovely to see the kids getting involved in planting beautiful trees. It is such a wonderful idea, and I am sure I will enjoy watching these trees grow too."

Ryan Huws, Communities Worker said, "Despite the heavy rain and mud, local school children and Flora Court residents came out to have a look and lend a hand with the tree planting. The schoolchildren also planted whips that will grow to be a long hedge and a haven for wildlife."

If you have any questions, comments, or would like to get involved, please contact treework@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk. If you would like to learn more about the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest, contact PSDCF@plymouth.gov.uk.



englandcommunityforests.org.uk/plymouth-and-south-devon-community-forest/

Complaints



Find out more
on our website

We have recently updated our Customer Complaints and Comments Policy to comply with the Complaint Handling Code for housing providers, which became a statutory requirement from 1 April 2024.

The updated policy outlines how we will be adhering to the Code requirements, and illustrates the primary goal of the Code - which is to promote best practices in handling complaints and enhancing services for residents.

The Complaint Handling Code covers the following areas:

- 1. Universal Definition of a Complaint:** The Code provides a clear definition of what constitutes a complaint.
- 2. Easy Access to Complaint Procedures:** Landlords must ensure that residents are aware of the complaints procedure and their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 3. Two-Stage Complaint Procedure:** The Code outlines a streamlined two-stage process for handling complaints, with specified response times.
- 4. Fairness in Complaint Handling:** The focus is on resident-centred processes that ensure fairness.
- 5. Taking Action and Remedies:** Landlords are expected to take appropriate steps to address complaints and provide suitable remedies.
- 6. Creating a Positive Culture:** Continuous learning and improvement are encouraged to foster a positive complaint handling culture.
- 7. Annual Self-Assessment:** Landlords must assess their compliance with the Code annually and submit self-assessment reports to the Ombudsman.

How can I make a complaint?



Fill out an enquiry form
on our website



Through your
MyPCH account



Call us on
0808 230 6500



Send us a message
on social media



In person at our
Head Office



Write to us:
Plymouth Community Homes,
Plumer House, Tailyour Road,
Crownhill, Plymouth, PL6 5DH

PCH Charity Fundraising

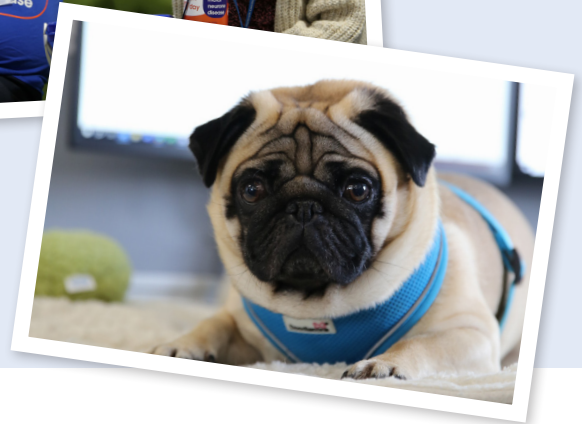
Motor Neurone Disease Association – Plymouth Group

In April 2023, PCH teamed up with the Motor Neurone Disease Association (MND Association) for 12 months of charity fundraising in memory of a much-missed and popular staff member, Lisa Goodman.

Over the last 12 months, staff have come together to raise an incredible £7,000 for the MND Association and MND Plymouth to ensure that the funds raised can be used to help people in our region.

Staff chose to nominate the association as its Charity of the Year for 2023 – 2024 with the cause being especially close to their hearts after Lisa, a long-standing member of staff at PCH, sadly passed away from the disease last year.

Throughout the year, PCH organised a whole host of fundraising events which included a football tournament, a Christmas craft fair, a quiz night, regular lunchtime quizzes, raffles, Bring Your Dog to Work Days and cake sales. As well as this, PCH held a raffle to win a VIP parking space for a month, staff contributed to the cause through their leaving collections, and individuals took on challenges to raise their own funds, including the '60 miles in August' challenge and a head shave.



Luna's Fund

At the start of April, we announced that we will be working with Luna's Fund for the next 12 months to raise funds to help the charity to provide practical and emotional support to bereaved parents in Devon and Cornwall.

Last year, Luna's Fund was given a spotlight in our Plymspirational feature in InTouch which shared the story of the charity founded in 2018 by Aimee and Ryan following the loss of their first born daughter Luna in 2017.

As a charity, Luna's Fund has a mission to protect, empower and positively impact the mental and physical health and well-being of parents experiencing baby loss.

The charity's vision is to empower a generation of well-equipped and well-informed bereaved parents

who feel confident, supported and motivated to break the baby loss taboo; to celebrate their baby and to champion better bereavement care.

“It is a pleasure to be able to support Luna's Fund this year, and help the team to provide compassionate, tailored support to bereaved parents in the South West.”

Jonathan Cowie said: “It is a pleasure to be able to support Luna's Fund this year, and help the team to provide compassionate, tailored support to bereaved parents in the South West.

“We look forward to kickstarting our fundraising efforts for the year ahead with a new group of volunteer steering group members at PCH working on ideas to help us raise money, and working with Aimee to generate as much money as possible for the parents they are supporting.”

In previous years, PCH has supported several charities including Gables Dogs and Cats Home, Woodside Animal Sanctuary, St Luke's Hospice, Devon and Cornwall Food Action, Age UK, Jeremiah's Journey and many more.

Digital Inclusion Scheme

Residents are being helped to get online and use technology through our Digital Inclusion Scheme, which is open to residents who may be experiencing digital poverty and feel excluded, as well as to those who do not have access to equipment or lack in digital skills and confidence.

The scheme is being run by PCH and Livewell Southwest through the 'Health and Housing' partnership, which began in 2021 to address local health inequalities and help improve the quality of life for PCH residents, so they can live independently for longer in their own homes.

The main aims of the scheme are to:



Support residents to get online



Provide residents in need with devices and/or data



Enable digital access to health services & online wellbeing resources



Provide digital support to help improve skills & confidence

If you qualify for the scheme, you will be provided with a basic phone, smart phone or tablet as well as data on a SIM card for six months.

Support will be provided to set up the device, and further advice and help will be given throughout a 12-month period. Reviews will take place during the scheme, to measure the impact that it is having on the resident taking part.

If you would like to be referred into the scheme, or want to find out more information, please contact your housing officer or email Rachael Fox on **Rachae.Fox@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk**

If there are ways you feel that we can be supporting your health and wellbeing, please share your feedback with us by emailing **Rachael.fox@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk**

Margaret's story

Margaret, a local PCH resident, has benefitted from the Digital Inclusion Scheme, after being given a tablet in 2023 to help her to get online.

She was delighted with the experience, and shares that it has changed her life.

Margaret said: "Through the Digital Inclusion Scheme I was given a tablet which I would never have been able to afford. When you get older, you've got to keep up with the times, otherwise you get left behind, as I did before I got my tablet.

"I was showed how to initially set it up at the digital support sessions, and the support has been really helpful to help me use the device.

"Before getting the tablet I didn't know anything about it, and I had no confidence at all. Now, I am shopping online, banking online and I am doing everything I want online, whereas before I didn't even know what online was.

"I am really, really delighted with what I have been given and how I've been helped.

"If I can do it, anyone can do it."



Watch the video and find out about social broadband tariffs here:

bit.ly/PCHdigitalinclusion





Looking after the sprinklers in your home

Where there are sprinklers installed in our buildings across the city, we need residents to help us keep these sprinklers working effectively so they can protect you if you need them.

Keeping my sprinklers safe

We have recently received reports of some residents painting over their sprinkler heads on their walls and ceilings – please don't do this as it could cause a defect and stop the sprinklers from activating in an emergency.

They are there to save lives – so please don't do anything which could stop them from being able to work effectively.

You mustn't obstruct the sprinkler heads whether they are on the wall or ceiling, or tamper with them in any way, as this could cause damage or blockages in the event of a fire.



Below we share some of the myths surrounding sprinklers and give some tips on keeping your sprinklers safe and functional.

How sprinklers work

The sprinkler system works separately from the fire alarm system.

If a fire breaks out, it creates hot gasses that rise to the ceiling and spread. When they reach the nearest sprinkler head it activates allowing a fine spray of water to cover the fire, which in most cases will put it out or limit toxic smoke until the fire service arrives.

Because the water will cool the fire straight away, only the sprinkler nearest the fire will activate. If the fire is hot enough that one sprinkler cannot handle it alone, the nearest sprinkler will activate. When the water has cooled the fire down enough, it will stop.

Will sprinklers activate anytime a smoke alarm is set off?

Each sprinkler is designed to activate when it senses a large heat change. They do not operate in response to smoke, burnt toast, cooking, steam or a smoke alarm.

If a fire starts will all the sprinklers activate?

In the event of a fire, only the sprinkler closest to it will activate, spraying water directly over the fire. The water from the sprinkler cools the fire's gases and in nearly all cases there is not enough heat to trigger the next nearest sprinkler, leaving the rest of the property dry and secure.

Won't the water create more damage than the fire?

Sprinklers can reduce property loss and damage in the event of a fire. They quickly control the heat and smoke from the fire, limiting damage to other areas of the home and giving people valuable time to leave the building

safely. Any water damage from a sprinkler will be much less severe than the damage caused by water from fire-fighting hose lines, which use up to eight-and-a-half times more water.

Awesome apprentices

Over the years, we've recruited a number of apprentices in Plymouth from admin and customer services to electrical and gas engineering, and many have gone on to secure permanent roles with us once they've completed their framework.

We're extremely proud to support the recruitment and training of local people and we want to share some of their success stories with you.



David Phillips successfully completes Apprenticeship in Painting and Decorating

We are pleased to announce that David Phillips has successfully completed his apprenticeship in painting and decorating. David joined PCH as an Apprentice Window Fabricator at Window Factory in May 2019, and after the factory shut down, he was transferred to a different department. In September 2020, he became a Painter and Decorator Apprentice and completed his end point assessment on February 9th, 2024, passing with flying colours.

Connor McKay nominated for Building Plymouth Apprenticeship of the Year Awards

We were thrilled that Connor McKay, Apprentice Plasterer was nominated for the Building Plymouth Apprentice of the Year Awards. Although he didn't take home the winning award, his nomination alone is recognition that reflects Connor's dedication and outstanding performance throughout his apprenticeship. It also reflects the commitment of PCH to nurturing and developing the next generation of skilled professionals.



Newly qualified Electricians secure permanent positions

We would like to congratulate Alfie Tasker, Finley Tamblyn and William Collard for each securing permanent electrician roles following the completion of their apprenticeships and newly qualified electrician roles.

Alfie and Finley carried out work experience placements with PCH in 2018 when they were in Year 10, prior to applying for apprenticeships within the organisation. Finley's work experience placement was with the Electrical team, and Alfie had two placements, one with the Electrical team and then another which covered different departments including Gas, Development and Homes and Neighbourhoods.

All three apprentices joined PCH straight after completing their GCSEs at local secondary schools including St. Boniface's College, Plymstock School and Saltash.Net respectively.

They completed their apprenticeships with Focus Training over a 42-month period, which took place during the pandemic – bringing its own challenges to each of them. PCH received great feedback from Focus Training about their performance, commenting on their high level of professionalism and organisation within their work.

At the end of their apprenticeship, Finley, Alfie and William applied for the fixed term positions where they were successful at interview. This role supported them to complete their 2391 qualification, alongside a full-time role.

Community Greening: Tree-Planting Collaboration with Janner Men's Shed

Members of the Janner Men's Shed community group recently joined forces with the South Devon City Forest team in North Prospect to plant trees and revitalise gardens.

The aim was to support wildlife and boost people's well-being, while ensuring buildings and areas weren't affected.

Mark from Plymouth City Council explained that their collaborations with various community groups and schools to green different parts of Plymouth are all about fostering community spirit and enhancing public spaces.

Mark shared information about the planting process with the Janner Men's Shed group, revealing they were

“It was great to see the Men's Shed members' enthusiasm in lending a hand for such meaningful work.”

introducing Sequoia Sempervirens (Redwood) trees. Phil, a Men's Shed member, actively engaged in last year's tree-planting in Central Park and said he finds events like this fulfilling, keeping him active post-retirement.

Phil said: “It's important to stay occupied after retiring, and these events offer a great way to do so.”

Gerald, another member of the Men's Shed and a first-timer at the planting event, said the experience was rewarding, keeping his mind busy and providing a sense of purpose. He joked: “I'll be feeling it for days!”

Gerald, an ex-forces member, said he values the social connections in the group, especially with fellow veterans.

Ryan Huws, Men's Shed Coordinator and PCH Communities Worker, praised the tree-planting initiative for its positive impact on wildlife and the environment, contributing to climate change efforts.

Ryan said: “It was great to see the Men's Shed members' enthusiasm in lending a hand for such meaningful work.”



See more on In Touch online

bit.ly/mensshedtrees





Welcoming our newest Board Member, Joanne Bowden

We are delighted to welcome Joanne (Jo) Bowden to the Board as our newest Resident Board Member.

Here at PCH we set great value in having people with lived experiences of our services and communities being involved in our decision-making processes, and we have two ring-fenced spaces on our Board for residents.

Jo is a PCH resident who has been a big part of our resident involvement work over the past 10 years, including being part of our Customer Focus Committee and taking part in Resident Scrutiny projects. Jo feels the skills and experience she has gained from being involved with PCH has shaped her journey to her new role.

Jo is Plymouth-born and bred, growing up around Mutley Plain and spending time in Eggbuckland. She currently lives in the Manadon area with her long-term partner and keeps active by taking her labradoodle Shadow and Goldendoodle Dakota out for regular walks.

Jo studied Ancient History at university before working for the MOD at Lymington Barracks, one of the Royal Marine training centres in the South West. She recalls: "There was an element of guilt as we watched the strict Marine training regimes whilst on our lunch break eating our sandwiches and cakes!"

A stint in construction followed and Jo became a qualified painter and decorator as well as a bricklayer, working for firms such as Wimpey and McAlpine on some large projects including helping to put in foundations for Plymouth Pavilions and working on the cladding project at Pembroke St in Mount Wise.

Joanne originally got involved with PCH when we were advertising free training opportunities for residents, taking up some of the courses on offer including First Aid training and Mental Health Awareness training.

"They were really helpful courses which PCH provided for free," Jo said. "I got to learn some useful skills as well as meet some like-minded people and I still keep in touch with the people from those original Learn for Free courses, as we still meet up for various clubs and activities.

"I went on to become an involved resident by joining one of the scrutiny sessions on offer – a flyer came through

the door and my partner said I have the skills to do it, and always say I want to be more involved, so I took up the challenge and applied to be a part of resident scrutiny.

"With the scrutiny group, we looked at a couple of large topics including anti-social behaviour and written communication. It was really rewarding to see the hard work we put into making recommendations to PCH result in creating real tangible changes to the way the organisation dealt with these subjects in order to put residents first and create a better customer experience."

It's not just with PCH where Joanne has picked up a range of skills and experience, lending her time

to volunteer for other organisations. Jo was Chair of Timebank SW from 2015-22 as well as being a Trustee on the Board of Four Greens Community Trust for eight years.

"I've spent a lot of time trying to help my community through various voluntary roles – with Timebank SW I felt it was time to step down

in order to give someone else a chance, and Four Greens is celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year with lots of events planned so watch this space!" Jo said.

In 2022 Joanne applied to be a resident co-optee on the Customer Focus Committee – this committee supports the Board by ensuring we are delivering excellent services to residents and supporting communities.

She said: "During this time I've seen some changes made to the committee to ensure residents' voices are truly heard to improve the customer experience with PCH in line with the values of the organisation."

Jo felt ready to apply to become a Board Member this year, and following a successful interview, she was appointed and attended her first full Board meeting in February.

Jo explains what it means to be a resident Board member for PCH: "I had a good knowledge of PCH before and being involved over the years has really benefitted me but being a Board member is more about the strategic side of the business. As a resident Board member, you are able to lend a resident perspective,

"As a resident Board member, you are able to lend a resident perspective, and it's your responsibility to hold the organisation accountable, making sure each decision puts residents first and aligns with the values of PCH."

and it's your responsibility to hold the organisation accountable, making sure each decision puts residents first and aligns with the values of PCH.

"I was made to feel very welcome at my first Board meeting and PCH is always keen to help you with any training or support you might need, including having a mentor to help you settle into your role. I was able to submit my questions in advance of the meeting, so the Chair was armed with my questions, and we were able to discuss them at the meeting.

"I see a really bright future for PCH – I'd like to see the organisation deliver on its Strategic Business Plan objectives and continue to grow and expand, building more homes in more ways and perhaps expanding some of local partnerships so that we continue to invest into our city and its communities."

So what would Joanne say to any PCH resident who wants to know more?

"I would encourage any resident who wants to get involved to do just that. Residents are able to grow their skills and confidence - and there are so many different opportunities, there will be one that's right for you. In the Business Plan vision, it says: 'We're focused on providing first-class services to our residents'.

"And the way we do that is by having residents with us side-by-side along the way."

If you are interested in finding out the different ways that residents can be involved in the Governance of PCH then you can contact the Governance team.

Meet Tracy Smith, our new Executive Director



Tracy Smith joined PCH in March as our new Executive Director of Homes and Communities to lead the directorates responsible for managing our homes, overseeing teams in housing and tenancy management, community services, resident engagement, repairs, compliance, asset management and delivery, commercial premises and leasehold properties.

Tracy has more than 20 years' experience of working in senior leadership and management roles with a customer and asset focus, most recently as the Director of Campus Experience and Commercial Services for University College London (UCL), overseeing services across the university's estate including security, commercial services and estate management.

Tracy has also held voluntary roles as a board member for several organisations, including housing associations, since 2020.

Tracy Smith said: "I've spent my career creating and delivering customer-focused services which actively support local communities, so I understand the importance of providing safe, affordable, high-quality homes for people who need them – and of enabling the services PCH provides to accurately reflect the needs of the local community.

"My experience of managing housing for leading universities, which is a highly regulated and customer

focused sector, will enable me to continue to develop the excellent customer-focused services for PCH's residents, and to enhance and improve the properties and the services the organisation provides."

"I've spent my career creating and delivering customer-focused services which actively support local communities, so I understand the importance of providing safe, affordable, high-quality homes for people who need them"

Jonathan Cowie, Chief Executive of Plymouth Community Homes, said: "We're thrilled to have recruited Tracy Smith to help us to drive forward work to improve the services we deliver for local people.

"Tracy has significant, transferable skills from her two decades of working in senior leadership roles, and I

am confident she will add great value to the organisation for the benefit of our residents and local people."

Tracy has joined Nick Jackson, Executive Director of Business Services and Development, and Gill Martin, Executive Director of Corporate Services, to complete the Executive Management Team at PCH.

Do you have any questions for Tracy?

In the next issue of InTouch we'll share a Q&A so please get in touch with your questions – you can email news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or pass on a question to your Housing Officer.

North Prospect's Marvellous Mosaic Project brings community together



PCH residents living in North Prospect have unveiled a meaningful piece of art at The Beacon to showcase their close-knit community spirit, collaboration and dedication to supporting people in their local area.

The Marvellous Mosaic Project began at the start of 2024, and there have been 12 sessions across the last two months to allow residents to share their ideas to build a mosaic which represents their values as a community. The sessions were held at The Beacon, the community hub in North Prospect during their 'Hobbies and Coffees' and 'Tea and Toast' weekly events, as well as at the Compassionate Café at the Wolseley Trust.

The project was funded by PCH, MAKE Southwest, Plymouth City Council and local Councillor Tina Tuhoj's Councillor Grant. It was supported by the Wolseley Trust who allocated their community space and the time of a staff member throughout the project.

Local artist, Michelle Mc Quinn also supported the project with the creation of the mosaic, and residents were grateful for her support and expertise.

Residents, staff and members of the local community came together at The Beacon to take a first look at the mosaic that has now been permanently displayed on the wall in the community hub.

Over 25 people gathered to watch the unveiling which was carried out by residents and members of the community, and all those in attendance let out a cheer as the mosaic was revealed.

Leigh Ferguson, Communities Worker at PCH, said:

"Residents really wanted to create something to be displayed which reflects how they feel about the North Prospect community. We were delighted to be able to support them to do this and the final piece of artwork looks amazing on the wall at The Beacon. We'd like to thank everyone who gave their time and put effort into creating the mosaic."

Nicki Chinnock, Wellbeing Hub Support Coordinator at the Wolseley Trust, said:

"Our Compassionate Café attendees were delighted to work with the Beacon Residents Group on the community mosaic project. Our group has been running for the last two years and was formed as a bereavement support group, so connection is really at the core of this group. This reflected in the design of the mosaic as well themes of friendship and combatting loneliness.

"We were thrilled to join Leigh and the PCH team for the 'official unveiling ceremony' with celebratory tea and cake. It was great to finally bring the two groups together to reveal their shared project. A big thank you to Leigh at PCH for coordinating the project and to Michelle, the artist who transformed our hand drawn ideas into a beautiful piece of treasured community artwork."

Michelle Mc Quinn said: "As a local artist I was delighted to be involved in this community mosaic project, particularly because it brought together many diverse groups and ages within the local community.

"The ideas for the project were led by those involved and their dedication to completing the project and their support of each other was testament to their bond as a strong community.

"I love what they have created and have enjoyed listening to their stories, and hope that their mosaic will be a talking point for others who use The Beacon."

Emily Ivey, a local member of the community found out about the project through a friend who had printed off and sent her the poster advertising the project. She supported the project throughout, and was delighted with the final outcome and to see her contributions on the wall of The Beacon.

She said: "I was so glad when my friend shared information about the project with me, and I immediately knew that I wanted to volunteer throughout the project and showcase my talent. I wanted to make a difference, and I knew that I couldn't do that by staying at home.

"I was able to cut up the tiles and stick them onto the base, I also made one of the hearts on the mosaic. It was really hard work but it was so worth it and I really enjoyed the project. It's nice to be part of something in the community."



See more photos of North Prospect's Marvellous Mosaic here:

bit.ly/marvellousmosaic



An introduction to The Beacon

The Beacon is a community hub located in the heart of the North Prospect regeneration and is open to residents, local businesses and the wider community for all to enjoy.

The Beacon has a lot on offer, including:



Spaces to hire for parties and groups



free wifi throughout the building



library



charity shop



free visitor parking



café



convenience store



office space to hire

The Beacon Coffee House and Café

The Beacon Coffee House and Café is the perfect spot to get your morning coffee fix or to grab your breakfast or lunch.

With a selection of drinks and snacks available, you can pick up a brew on the go or catch up with some friends over a slice of cake in their café located on the ground floor. They have baguettes, paninis, pasties, sausage or bacon baps and much more.

Monday – Thursday: 8:30am – 2pm.

Friday – 8:30am – 1:30pm.



Our groups

At The Beacon we hold regular groups where everyone's welcome. Including:

Tea & Toast – Every Tuesday, 10am – 12:30pm

Hobbies & Coffees – Every Friday, 10am – 1pm

Craft Club - Our Craft Club at The Beacon is a fun and creative way to spend your time.

Join us for a friendly and relaxed session where you can meet new people, learn new skills and work on exciting craft projects.

No experience necessary! All materials are provided, and complimentary tea and coffee are included.

Come along on Mon 10th June or Mon 24th June between 10am – 1pm.

For more information contact **0808 2306500** and ask for Leigh Ferguson or email learnforfree@pch.co.uk



The Reuse Centre Catalogue: Giving a Second Life to Unused Items

The Reuse Centre on Burrington Way collects and repurposes items from vacant PCH properties for others to use.

At the centre, items are segregated and sorted into various categories such as white goods, toys, beds, kitchen appliances, drawers, wardrobes, TVs, tables, and chairs. They aim to recycle as much as possible, ensuring that items deemed reusable are refurbished and prepared for redistribution to residents in need.

In September last year, Plymouth Community Homes introduced the Reuse Centre Catalogue, an easy to use and extensive database of items that are available for redistribution. The Catalogue was developed internally by Michael Hall, IT User Experience Analyst, and Donna Vickers, Environmental Services Charge Hand, which has proven to be highly effective with Housing Officers providing for residents.

The catalogue is accessed internally only and the housing officers are responsible for placing orders by completing a form on behalf of the resident. Residents are not authorised to place orders. If required, the housing officer can show pictures of the items to the residents, either during their visit or by sending pictures through email. This ensures that residents are happy with the item before it is reserved or delivered.

Louise Turner, Head of Property, Safety and Environmental, said: “The implementation of the Reuse Catalogue is an essential tool to provide residents in need with various items at the earliest opportunity. We want to reach out to residents about this amazing service and encourage them to contact their Housing Officers for any items they may need. I would also like to thank Mike Hall and Donna Vickers for their development of the catalogue.”



Donna Vickers, manages the Catalogue, adding new items with descriptions and images. The catalogue is organised by category, making it easier for housing officers to find the items they need for residents. Residents can place orders for items through housing officers who coordinate delivery logistics, including scheduling collection or delivery, all at no cost. The catalogue serves as a vital resource for people who are in need of essential items such as furniture, appliances, and household items.

“The implementation of the Reuse Catalogue is an essential tool to provide residents in need with various items at the earliest opportunity”

Since September 2023, the Reuse Centre has completed 104 deliveries, delivering 188 items to residents in need. These items have made a significant impact on the lives of those who have

received them, providing them with the necessary tools to improve their quality of life.

The Reuse Centre Catalogue is an excellent example of how technology and upcycling can help improve people’s lives. By making it easier for residents to access essential items, the catalogue has become an invaluable resource that has helped many people in the community.

We met with Steve and Jeff, Environmental Rangers who are involved in the collection of items from our void properties. They said “ On average, we handle up to 10 collections per day, with the volume varying based on the size and quantity of items. Our process involves loading the vans, sorting through the collected items, and then delivering them to the reuse centre.”

For instance, Donna, Environmental Services Charge Hand, ran us through the process of a television that arrived last week. Upon arrival, the item undergoes a visual inspection for damages and is tested for safety using a PAT testing machine. In cases where items like drawers arrive damaged, Donna and the team undertake repairs such as replacing handles, sanding down surfaces, fixing and tightening joints, and reinforcing the



structure for its next use. Once verified safe, the item is cleaned and uploaded to the Reuse Centre Catalogue with a unique number for ordering and delivery purposes.

At the Centre we spoke with Martyn Fairbrass, a Neighbourhood Ranger, who shared a heart-warming experience from two weeks ago when he delivered essential items to a resident at Wyoming Close. Among the items were a cot, a baby changing station, and a starter pack for a kitchen. The resident expressed overwhelming gratitude, making Martyn's efforts feel incredibly rewarding and confirming the value of our work at the centre.

We followed the journey of some rehoused items to their new homes by speaking with Trevor, a resident at Taunton Ave, who recently used our Reuse Catalogue Service.

Due to health issues, Trevor found it challenging to go out for necessary items, especially larger goods. Emma Hawkins, Assistant Housing Officer at Plymouth Community Homes, who introduced Trevor to his property at PCH, advised she would check the Reuse Catalogue for any items of interest. Emma ordered an

'Introduction Pack' for Trevor, which included a washer & dryer, fridge, kettle, toaster, pots and pans, and a variety of cutlery.

Plymouth Community Homes delivered all the items to Trevor's home at no cost. They brought in the fridge, washing machine, kettle, toaster, saucepans, and cutlery and fitted everything for him. Trevor was delighted with the service and said, "I can't say how much of a difference it's made. It's amazing, and I can't thank PCH enough." He also expressed his gratitude to the delivery team, who were incredibly helpful.



Do you want to be a part of our Tall Buildings Safety Panel?

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) was introduced after the Building Safety Act 2022 was passed, creating a body to oversee the safety of high-rise buildings, making sure they are designed, constructed and maintained to meet strong regulated safety standards.

As part of our commitment to building safety, we've created a new post to look after all of our tall buildings - tall buildings are classed as 18 metres plus or seven or more floors in height.

Jo Rees, Tall Buildings Liaison Officer will work with Marc Gray, our Interim Fire and Building Safety Manager alongside Joe Loughran, Housing Officer and Nicola Bingham, Assistant Housing Officer to ensure our tall buildings are safe and that we are working collectively with the residents who live there.

We have a new Tall Building Resident Panel who met for the first time on 7 May 2024 – with residents from across our six tall buildings who will work regularly with us to:

- Improve the information on changes to safety within each building.
- Improve general safety knowledge and understanding.
- Work with the Fire and Rescue Service on sessions with residents.
- Invite residents on estate walkabouts to support building management.

Marc Gray, Interim Fire and Building Safety Manager said: "We are demonstrating our commitment to resident safety by making sure we work with the residents who live in these buildings to take their views into account when making building safety improvements. We would love to hear from more of our tall buildings residents to be involved and part of the Panel."

engagement strategies and building specific resident handbooks which need resident input."

If you want to be part of our Resident Panel, you must live in one of our six tall buildings – that's Lynher House, Tamar House, Tavy House, Morley Court, Woodlands Court or Marlborough House.

"PCH will be working with the Resident Panel on a range of other projects such as building specific resident



You can contact us to join or to find out more information at BuildingSafetyBSR@pch.co.uk

New Consumer Standards for housing associations

The Regulator of Social Housing has brought in new Consumer Standards to hold social landlords to account and ensure they are delivering quality and affordable housing and services for residents. That means putting residents in the driving seat, and here we'll look at how you can get involved in improving our services to residents.

Who is the Regulator of Social Housing?

The Regulator does just that - they ensure social landlords meet standards and expectations when delivering housing for residents. Part of the Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, they regulate providers of social housing on things like financial viability, tenancy standards, governance and neighbourhoods and safety.

The new Consumer Standards have been brought in from 1 April, and they will be used to assess how well social landlords are doing at providing quality homes and services.

The Regulator's new Consumer Standards

The Safety and Quality Homes Standard focuses on ensuring that landlords understand the condition of all of their homes and make use of that data to provide safe, quality homes.

Landlords are required to deliver repairs, maintenance and planned improvements in an effective, efficient and timely manner, and must be clear on their health and safety responsibilities.

The Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard requires landlords to be transparent with tenants, treat them fairly and respectfully so they can

access services. Tenants must be able to voice concerns where necessary, influence decisions, and hold the landlord accountable.

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard means landlords need to engage with relevant parties to ensure tenants live in secure, well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.

The Tenancy Standard outlines a fair allocation and letting of homes, as well as requirements for managing tenancies by landlords.



Do you have home contents insurance?

Call: 0808 230 6500
or visit:

www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

So, what does this mean for PCH?

Last year we launched our Strategic Business Plan which sets out our mission and vision for the organisation for the next five years. There are 12 objectives within the Plan that we hope to achieve over the next 5 years.



We've chosen our top 5 objectives in the business plan as our priorities to deliver on initially. They are to:



Know and listen to our customers



Deliver outstanding services for residents



Maintain and improve our homes and buildings



Increase the number, type and tenure of our homes to meet a growing need for affordable housing



Value our people

We are confident that we can deliver on these objectives with the help of our residents.

What does this mean for residents and how can I get involved?

We need you, it's as simple as that – working together allows us to understand and highlight what we're doing well and what we need to improve on.

Help shape and improve our services and tell us exactly what it's like to be a PCH resident.

By getting involved for any amount of time or at any level you can:

- Improve things for you and your neighbourhood
- Help us to make key decisions that will affect residents and improve our services
- Learn new skills, access free training and improve your confidence
- Boost your chances of getting paid work or into further education
- Meet new people and make new friends

There's lots of ways to get involved and have your say, and you can spend as little or as much time as you want.

To read our Strategic Business Plan, visit our website: plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/about/what-we-do

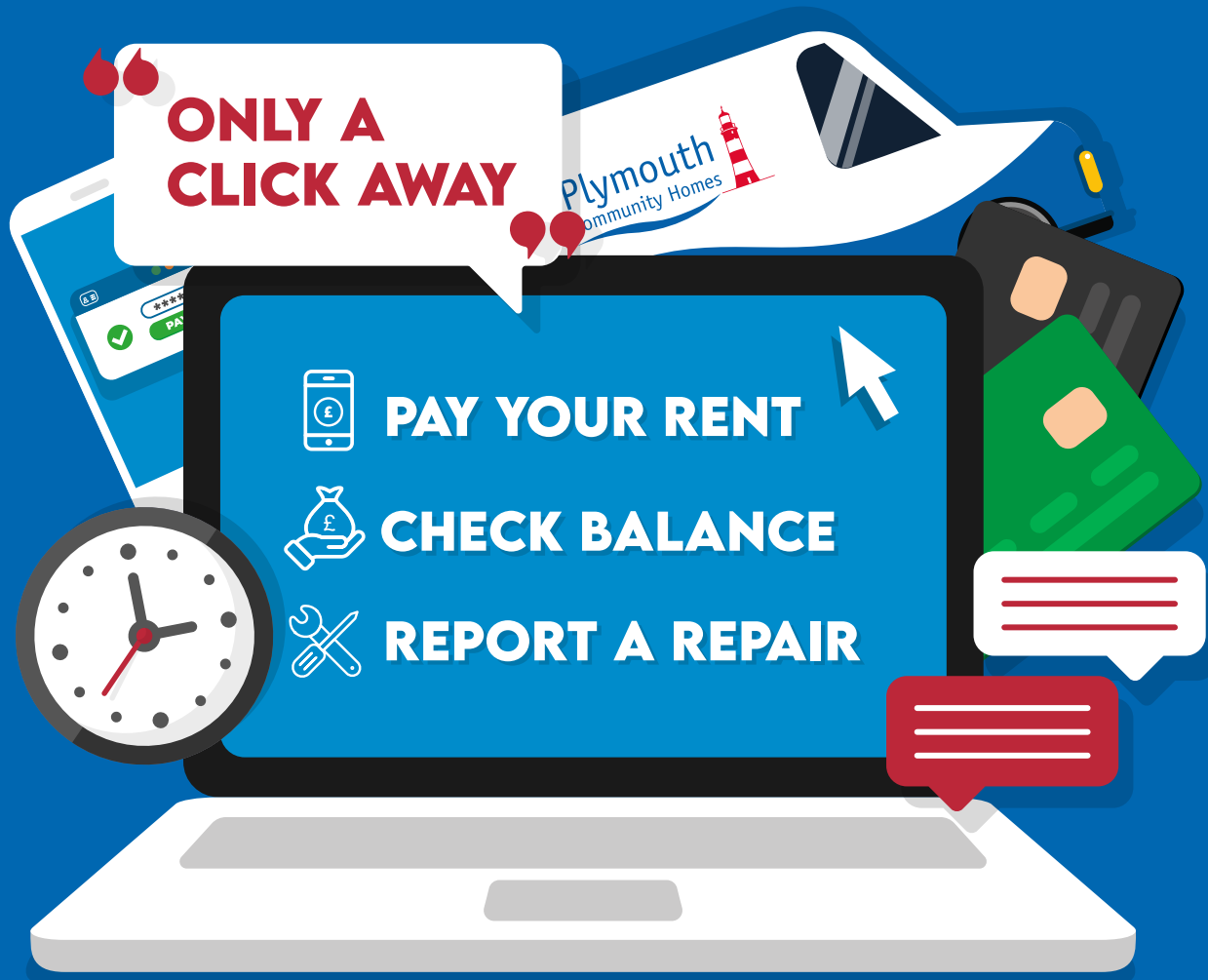
To find out more about getting involved, visit our website: plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/your-community/get-involved

Scan to visit our website

plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk



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


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

Email news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

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 0808 230 6500

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