

InTouch

Issue 54 Spring 2023



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WELCOME

Welcome to the spring edition of InTouch.

The warmer 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 to work on ways of improving how we deal with it.

In this edition of InTouch, we look at how PCH has already made a number of improvements around managing damp and mould issues with a return to the You Said/We Did feature reviewing the progress we've made so far.

There is also information about the rent and service charge increases which take effect from 3 April 2023 – and you can visit the PCH website to find out more about how rent and service charges are calculated.

Our spotlight is on Ron King House, a city centre Housing with Support scheme, and we hear from residents about what living there means for them, as well as talking to residents at another sheltered scheme about the support they had to improve their health and wellbeing thanks to our partnership with Livewell South West.

There's a great feature about the Plymouth Warriors, a disability-friendly football club which offers an inspiration for us all.

It's great to see Beacon Café in North Prospect has reopened, and don't forget our gym at Plumer House is also open again for PCH residents – come along on Tuesday and Thursdays to use the state of the art equipment free of charge. See page 18 for more.

If you want to get involved and help us shape our services, we still have opportunities for residents to join our Customer Focus Committee (CFC) – and this edition, we hear from our newest CFC co-optee members, Stacey and Melony, about the benefits of joining.



Valerie

**Valerie Lee,
Chair of the Board**



Well Brewed is open Monday to Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm and Saturdays 9.30am – 3.30pm and is located at Frontfield Crescent, Southway.

Well Brewed to put you in a good mood

Nestled in a cosy nook is a delightful local coffee shop that owner Suzanne has lovingly transformed into a place you'll want to visit time and again to relax in.

Its reclaimed wood and brickwork, industrial surface-mounted lights and exposed beams all give this hidden gem a certain charm, and Well Brewed has the look and feel of a traditional, yet modern coffee house. Suzanne has taken her time to create a warm and friendly atmosphere and serves up a Barista menu of fresh coffee, speciality drinks, locally sourced light bites and sweet treats.

Conveniently located with free parking to the front, and perfectly sandwiched between Southway, Tamerton Foliot, Derriford and Crownhill – Well Brewed opened late last year in one of Plymouth Community Homes' commercial buildings, and has already proved popular with its customers.

Suzanne explains: "We opened at the end of November, and we are already seeing a lot of local people coming back time and time again, as they know it's in a quiet area and somewhere they can come in and have a chat with friends over coffee, or to get some work done. "We are just learning what our customers want and adapting the menu to suit. At the moment we offer a selection of hot pasties, pastries and treats, but I would

like to begin serving soup and sandwiches and expanding the menu, and we're always keen to hear about what people want.

"We've received some really nice comments since we've been open, with customers telling me that it's such a convenient location, and with the parking at the front it's somewhere they can easily pop in and grab a coffee and bite to eat, or sit in and take their time. We've had a few staff from PCH pop in recently looking to take advantage of our loyalty scheme as well!"



New committee members

The Customer Focus Committee (CFC) exists to give residents a voice in how PCH works.

The CFC is made up of five PCH Board Members and up to seven co-optee resident members. We have recently welcomed two new members.

Here, Melony and Stacey tell us why they wanted to get involved and how they are finding their induction.



Melony



Stacey

Why did you decide to join the CFC?

I decided to join the CFC as I feel it is important to give back to my community as much as I can. I am a passionate supporter of PCH's community-focused ethos and so I chose the CFC to engage at a level in which I felt my skills and experience could be beneficial.

What would you say to another individual who is considering joining CFC?

I would encourage individuals to join the CFC if they felt that they could benefit from more intellectual stimulation and would like to support their community in this way, whilst being fully supported and encouraged by PCH.

Does the frequency of meetings fit in with your day-to-day life?

CFC meetings are only held four times annually which gives plenty of opportunities for rest and other activities between them and precludes them from becoming an overbearing part of my life.

How is the CFC induction process so far?

I have felt extremely supported during my induction. The people that make up CFC have been excellent, and I have a mentor to help me in my CFC journey. It can be overwhelming with all the information, but Debbie Roche (mentor) and the Governance Team have made me feel comfortable and at ease.

My first CFC meeting was also a success. There was lots of information to take in and I was able to express my opinions.

I am sure I will grow and become more confident as I attend more meetings, alongside my co-optees.



Recruiting now

We are still on our journey to fill all of the seven co-optee resident positions and we are looking for tenants, leaseholders and shared owners to join the CFC.

By joining the CFC as a co-optee, you could support the Board by making sure PCH offers excellent services to all its residents.

If you are interested in joining the committee and want to find out more, please visit the CFC dedicated webpage on our website or contact the Governance Team on 01752 388364 or governance@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk.



For this edition of InTouch, we visited the residents of Ron King House, a centrally located Housing with Support scheme.

PCH has 11 Housing with Support schemes across the city which are especially tailored for people aged over 55 who have a need for accommodation with extra support. Each scheme contains bungalows or self-contained flats, and every property has an alarm system so help can be requested 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Within the Ron King House scheme in Stonehouse, there is a communal kitchen, lounge and patio garden, as well as a laundry room, lift, on-site parking and a guest room. Each home has a fitted kitchen, level access electric shower, uPVC double glazing, gas central heating and smoke detectors.

Residents living in these schemes often host their own social events, and at Ron King House, residents enjoy hosting a monthly quiz, bingo and food nights in their communal areas. The cooking is organised by the treasurer of the resident group chef Robert Machin, who offers eat-in and takeaway options for the residents who want to get involved.

Within each scheme, PCH employs Housing with Support Officers who are available within working hours to offer light-touch support, manage communal areas and facilities, as well as to ensure the building is safe and well looked after.

As well as the benefits socially, residents benefit from the support of their Housing with Support Officer in a variety of ways, and the officer at Ron King House, Allyson Hood, has been praised for her efforts.

Robert Machin, resident at Ron King House, said: "I had no idea that the Housing with Support Officer could

provide such vital support to me and the other residents living here. I am so glad that I accepted the support on the day our Housing with Support Officer first knocked on my door, and I couldn't be without her.

"It's been a very tough time for me due to surgery and mental illness but nonetheless Ally has always been in touch, with not only me but has also liaised with my family to support me."

"I HAD NO IDEA THAT THE HOUSING WITH SUPPORT OFFICER COULD PROVIDE SUCH VITAL SUPPORT TO ME AND THE OTHER RESIDENTS LIVING HERE."

Virginia, a resident who has lived at Ron King House for just under a year, has had her life transformed by moving there. She moved from North England to Plymouth and is delighted to be living in the city now.

She said: "I didn't know anyone when I was moving to Plymouth but from the second, I stepped foot in Ron King House, I was fully supported - and continue to be supported - by both the other residents and our Housing with Support Officer.

"Due to my situation, the Housing with Support Officer was my only point of contact at the very start. As I came with only a few bags and my car, the residents came together to help me, and the assistance I have received is just unbelievable.

"I am really happy with the way Plymouth Community Homes has supported me and moving here is better than I could ever have hoped for."

To apply for a Housing with Support property, visit Devon Home Choice or contact 01752 305496.

To speak to someone in our Housing with Support team, contact us at housing.withsupport@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or call 0808 230 6500.

Plymouth's Women's Craft Collective

Donating knitted goods to Plymouth Community Homes residents



Plymouth Community Homes residents in North Prospect have received a generous donation of knitted goods from The Women's Craft Collective to support them during the cost-of-living crisis.

The Women's Craft Collective is a 'close-knit' community set up in partnership with the Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council in 2009 for women of all ages and backgrounds to come together to share and learn traditional crafts.

After 15 years, the group is still thriving with 40 members who attend each week, regularly undertaking projects to create items to support people living in Plymouth, including for Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) residents living in North Prospect.

Karl Trevis, Communities Worker at PCH, paid a visit to the ladies in the Knitting Group at The Box, Plymouth's award-winning museum, art gallery and archive, where they meet every Friday, and where they kindly offered to knit and donate items for families who attend The Beacon.

The regular members of the group have so far knitted blankets and clothes for babies, as well as scarves and

hats, which have been very well received by residents who collected them from The Beacon.

Each year the group take on projects to create items for Plymouth people, including hospital patients and those in local care centres, as well as for different charities. They host a 'Big Knit' event each year which is open to anyone and usually involves local school children.

Doreen Willis has been a member of the Women's Craft Collective group for over 10 years and declares herself as a compulsive knitter. Her signature knit is a sleeveless pullover, perfect for babies and small children in the winter, as well as mittens and boots for babies.

The group has been a lifeline for her, especially during a time of poor health, and she loves her trips to The Box each week to socialise with her fellow knitters.

Doreen Willis said: "I push myself every Friday to come to the Knitting Group at The Box as I struggle with my health making it difficult to get out. I enjoy being able to use my skills to create items to give back to the community and socialise with ladies who are all extremely friendly and welcoming."



"We thrive from supporting the local Plymouth community, including Plymouth Community Homes' residents, especially families who could be struggling to afford to keep warm during the cost-of-living crisis."

"As well as knitting for The Beacon, we also create items for the dementia ward in Mount Gould Hospital, fishermen, and those who are homeless. We receive a donation of wool from charity shops such as Oxfam, who sell on any items we make using this wool, and we enjoy giving back to the charity."

The generous donations of goods from the ladies at the Women's Craft Collective have really boosted the morale of PCH residents, especially the donation that was given to families before Christmas.

Karl Trevis, Communities Worker at PCH, said: "We are extremely grateful to the ladies at the Women's Craft Collective who have so far donated numerous items to support PCH residents who come to The Beacon."

"The thought and time that is put into creating the knitted items is very much appreciated by PCH staff and also the residents who benefit directly, especially during winter if money is tight." Shantelle Boundy, a resident living in North Prospect and a regular visitor to The Beacon, said: "It can get really expensive when you have children that are constantly growing and need the next size up in items every few months. Having a constant supply of knitted items from the Women's Craft Collective is so useful and puts my mind at ease, especially during the winter months."

"We are lucky that the ladies at The Box are spending their time knitting goods for the community, especially for us at The Beacon and it benefits me so greatly. I want to thank the ladies for their time, and for supporting me during this cost-of-living crisis."

The group meet in the Simmons Learning Room every Friday morning from 10am – 12pm, and there is a voluntary membership fee of £1.50 per week.

They are currently restricting numbers and operating a waiting list due to demand. If you would like to be added to the waiting list, please email TheBoxLearning@plymouth.gov.uk.

Community Room revamp at Devonport block

Residents of Plymouth's Marlborough House are enjoying their newly refurbished Community Room thanks to a generous donation by PCH contractors.

Plymouth Community Homes hired contractor Lancer Scott to deliver a £1.4 million project at the block in Devonport to replace the Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) style-cladding at the roof level on the prominent building.

Lancer Scott wanted to give something back to residents in thanks for their patience and understanding during the works and donated their time and work totalling £10,000 to refurbish the Marlborough House Community Room to help make the space warmer and more welcoming, with new carpets, ceilings, decoration, fixtures and fittings as well as brand new furniture.

"It is a great space for those living in Marlborough House."

Two new televisions were installed, including one by the entrance area which can act as an electronic noticeboard, and furniture was bought, including a new sofa for the Marlborough House foyer to create a more welcoming communal entrance.

The original Community Room was officially opened on 2 November 1988 by Councillor Gordon Draper, Lord Mayor of Plymouth at the time, and it has been a space well-used by residents for over 35 years.

Adrian Willcocks, who has lived at Marlborough House for over 47 years, is delighted with the newly refurbished community room. He said: "It has lovely décor, it is bright, airy and modern and it is a great space for those living in Marlborough House. It is a space where I like to socialise with the other residents, and I enjoy the Tea and Toast meet up on a Tuesday where I can sit with a cup of tea and catch up with my neighbours."



Rent and service charges from April 2023

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.

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.

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

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

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

Rents this year

Like all businesses, PCH is facing increased costs and rising inflation rates which mean it is more expensive for us to carry out repairs and improvements, and to build new affordable homes. Our rents are our main source of income to help us meet these costs.

We set our rents using Government guidance, and this year, the Government has capped rent increases for all social housing providers at 7%. This is less than the 11.1% increase it would otherwise have been, based on the standard formula of allowing increases of inflation + 1% (using the September Consumer Prices inflation rate of 10.1% plus 1%).

By capping rent increases at 7%, PCH will have to absorb some of the additional costs created by the increased rate of inflation. PCH remains committed to delivering a full service to tenants, although we will be in a tighter financial position.

The majority of our tenants, including Shared Owners and those renting garages or parking spaces, will see a 7% increase in their rent from April 2023, and this applies to anyone paying social rent or paying an affordable rent for a home built during the last 11 years.

Tenants in some of our older homes currently paying an affordable rent may see a rent reduction, or a lower increase than 7%, because their affordable rent is switching to a social rent as part of an agreement we have with the Government to make this change.

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, more than two thirds of service charges will increase by less than £5 a week, and 80% of all increases will be less than £7 a week.

The majority of our service charges are increasing because PCH is facing increased costs for labour, energy, materials and services as a result of the increased rate of inflation and cost-of-living rises.

We have worked hard to make sure the amounts remain affordable, and this year, PCH has also taken a decision to absorb some of the extra costs of supplying some services during the period between October 2021 and September 2022 to help support our tenants, rather than pass on the full amounts.

Support charges for residents of sheltered accommodation will be facing an increase this year for the first time in 14 years. The current charge no longer covers the full cost of the service, so PCH is introducing an increase of £1 per week from 3 April for current tenants. Housing with Support Officers will be in touch with tenants to explain the changes.

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

<https://www.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.



Be wary of 'no win no fee' claims

Residents are warned to beware of disreputable firms who are actively targeting tenants of social housing associations and encouraging them to make disrepair claims by promising large sums in compensation.

Some firms can pledge 'no win no fee' deals and urge tenants to agree to make unnecessary legal claims which can fail, leaving tenants having to pay expensive court costs. Even if claims are successful, tenants can be left with a very small amount of money after huge legal bills are deducted, or the compensation can even be less than the legal bills owed, so residents can end up in debt.

Once a tenant has signed up to a 'no win no fee' deal, they have found it very difficult to extract themselves from it without a claim being made against them by the firm they initially found helpful and supportive.

A better way

If you have already reported a repair or defect and are unhappy it has not been dealt with properly, housing associations like Plymouth Community Homes offer a clear and accessible complaints process, in line with the Social Housing White Paper pledge to help tenants of social housing associations feel empowered to make complaints when they need to.

PCH is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service, an independent body which reviews complaints when they can't be resolved, and the Ombudsman can resolve disputes without the need for tenants to go to court. The service is free, independent and impartial for all tenants and landlords.

Complaints welcome

PCH is always working to improve services and welcomes complaints, as they can help us review the way we work and make changes when they are needed. Residents are urged to use the complaints process in the first instance therefore, with the option to escalate an issue to the Ombudsman if it cannot be resolved, rather than risk potentially expensive court costs.

Mike Williams, Head of Asset Management at PCH, said: "Some disreputable firms are actively trying to make a profit by misleading tenants to take up what they allege are 'no win no fee' cases. There's no such thing as 'no fee' when you look into it – and there are many cases reported nationally of tenants being left with huge debts after a stressful court action because they fell victim to false promises like this.

"We're concerned our tenants could be encouraged by unscrupulous firms to launch legal actions which could very likely not lead to any compensation at all, and actually risk tenants having to pay large court fees and legal bills instead. Even if a case was successful, the court fees would not be covered by the 'no win no fee' pledge and tenants could see most of their compensation lost to bills.

"We're not trying to stop our tenants making complaints – we actually welcome them as they can help us to improve our services – but tenants should realise that the best option is to first give PCH a chance to make things right, by reporting a defect or a repair through our channels, and then by making a complaint if something has gone wrong, and to trust in the process that is there."

Make court action the last resort

Citizens Advice suggests court action against a landlord should be a "last resort" in matters of disrepair issues, warning it can be costly and time consuming for tenants.

The service also suggests contacting your landlord first and following their complaints process, as a court might reject your claim otherwise.

How to make a complaint at PCH

The complaints process at PCH is detailed on our website here:

<https://www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk/media/3153/how-do-i-make-a-complaint.pdf>

You can make a complaint through:

- A contact form on our website
- The MyPCH resident portal
- Social media message
- Calling us on 0808 230 6500
- In person at our offices in Plumer House or in the PCH city centre shop
- By writing to us at Plumer House, Tailyour Road, Crownhill, Plymouth PL6 5DH

A supervisor will carry out investigations and if your complaint can't be resolved quickly, it progresses to the next stage, with a Senior Manager working with a PCH Director to review your complaint and provide a response.

If this doesn't resolve the issue, you would be invited to a review meeting involving staff and a Board member, and a full response is provided.

Then there is an option to send the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for an independent review if you remain unhappy.

PCH considers compensation for customers where there has been loss or damage, considered on the merit of the claim, and where there is evidence to support a compensation claim.

North Prospect Phase Four & 10-year anniversary

The final phase of the North Prospect regeneration project is set to create a total of 196 new homes for Plymouth by 2025.

Phase Four, known as 'Mayflower Leat', began in 2019 and will deliver 87 new homes for affordable rent, 38 homes for shared ownership sale, and 71 homes for private sale through Linden Homes.

The development is being built by Countryside Partnerships (previously known as Vistry Partnerships) and is the final phase of the North Prospect regeneration project, providing energy-efficient, modern new homes for local people to replace many of the dated, damp old houses previously in the area.

Mayflower Leat has been nominated for the Affordable Housing Development of the Year award in the Insider Residential Property Awards 2023 in recognition for the quality of the scheme.

Robert Pendall, Site Manager at Mayflower Leat, recently won the Pride in the Job award for NHBC, the UK's leading new homes warranty and insurance provider, and the development has also been recognised at the LABC Building Excellence Awards national finals, as well as looking to obtain a Secure by Design Developers' Gold Award.

In December last year, PCH, Plymouth City Council and Homes England came together to celebrate the completion of Phase Five (which completed ahead of Phase Four), with the official opening of Briarwood Heights, a new development of 33 one-bedroom flats available for affordable rent by over 55s.

The North Prospect regeneration also marked its 10-year anniversary, and residents, stakeholders and staff came together to toast one of the largest redevelopment schemes delivered nationally, as well as the largest of its kind to take place in the South West.

Over the course of all five phases, PCH will have created 491 homes for affordable rent, 195 homes for shared ownership, and 440 homes for open market sale.



Plymouth Warriors is a local disability-friendly football club which encourages players to realise their potential through sport, enabling everyone to have the chance to play the beautiful game with the same opportunities, while developing their skills, confidence, and self-esteem. Founder and Chairman Luke Childs founded the Warriors in 2017 with the vision of creating a safe space for children with additional needs, so they had the opportunity to be involved and included in sport.

From those early days, the success of the Warriors meant they grew in size considerably, now boasting three full-time men's sides, a ladies' side and two children's sides – an Under-16s and an Under-12s.

Running this many teams as a club is a full-time job and Luke is surrounded by a number of close-knit volunteers of coaches and club officials who give up their valuable time to help, support and nurture – with everyone sharing the same ethos, which gives the club its unique identity.

Luke talked us through those early days: "It was my own children's experiences that led me to discover there were a group of young people who had tried football with some other clubs but hadn't quite found the experience they wanted. So we looked into starting our own club and we were surprised quite how quickly things took off and how it grew in popularity.

"We started off with the original children's team, and within months the parents had decided they wanted to set up their own team, so we currently have three men's sides who play in the various disability leagues – our Gladiators, Romans and Admirals.

"We've named all our teams so that everyone involved can feel like a Warrior, no matter who they are – our ladies are the Lionesses, and the children's teams are the Saxons and Mavericks.

"With so many teams, everyone plays a part and those behind the scenes are the most important – each of our coaches and volunteers come DBS checked and Sarah Hulme our Club Secretary, Sharon Childs our Treasurer and Claire Elliott our Welfare Officer really help run the club and make it tick.

"At the moment we're undergoing a programme to expand the club and provide our young people with comprehensive coaching which includes concentrating on our values of respect, unity, fun, collaboration and innovation.

"As we are a Community Interest Company, it's important for us to get the balance right, and we make sure that we run our club in a way that focusses purely on the players and the future of the club. We are currently paying for some of our coaches to achieve their Level 1 Football Association (FA) coaching badges so they can really give our Warriors the best education, both on the pitch and beyond – where development of the player and the person exceeds the need to win.

"We base our coaching on the FA's 4-corner model to



develop our players to reach their potential and apply it to all aspects of their lives, concentrating on our players' psychological, technical, physical and social skills. We aim to support everyone's development, inclusive of ability, so everyone can learn and play without pressure, while promoting teamwork and respect for others."

This philosophy seems to be paying off for the Warriors, with the men's first team currently plying their trade in the Premier Disability Division, but it is perhaps with the Under-12s side where Luke and his coaches can see where their tireless hard work pays off most notably.

Jack Corber is one of the latest coaches to have joined the Plymouth Warriors, with the team paying for his coaching through a grant from the Barclays Community Fund. Jack told of his pride of how far the young team has developed since its first taste of tournament football.

"We've only had them together for a few months and the difference in the players between the first tournament and our latest one was fantastic," he said. "You could see they were playing for each other, encouraging one another and communicating well with their new friends. It makes

it worthwhile, the team having fun and developing skills without even knowing it – I'm really proud of everyone single one of them."

So, what next for the future of the Warriors?

Luke said: "The club itself is a part of the community and creating the best possible environment to develop our players. We look to offer support to every individual at the club and provide an affordable activity for everyone.

"Going forward our vision is to build a hub and an academy for each age group from 5-years old, men and women, and specialist teams including players who may be blind, deaf, or have cerebral palsy. We want to continue to build on our partnerships, particularly with educational establishments across the South West, and grow the club.

" Because that is what being a Warrior means – being prouder, stronger, together."

For more information on Plymouth Warriors, visit their website plymouthwarriors.co.uk

"We're here to make sure that everyone has a chance to play football, provide access and make sure that every player counts."

YOU SAID

WE DID

SPOTLIGHT ON DAMP AND MOULD

Damp, mould, and condensation is high on the agenda for housing providers with new regulation coming into force, and here at PCH we want to do even more and become leaders in the sector for how we manage damp and mould in our properties, and how we respond to reports from our residents.

We've recently launched our new Damp and Condensation Policy in consultation with you, and we're also making

changes to the way we prioritise reports of damp and mould, and how we manage long-running issues, to improve our service.

We want to let you know an update on the suggestions you gave us, and how we're using your feedback to improve our approach to damp, mould and condensation.

YOU SAID

We should consider our approach to damp and mould as a housing provider.

We should take a zero-tolerance approach to reports of damp and tackle the causes.

All staff should understand the causes and possible remedies through a training and awareness programme.

We should review and improve available information for residents.

We should regularly communicate with residents about the actions we're taking to resolve reports of damp and mould.

WE DID

We consulted with residents to create the new Damp and Condensation Policy which sets out what residents can expect from PCH.

Ensure that all reports are logged and an inspection from a qualified repairs inspector is carried out as soon as possible to find solutions.

We've created an easy guide animation training video for staff to help them understand the causes of damp and condensation, the guidance on how to manage it, and what our residents should expect from us as their landlord.

500 staff have been identified to be trained, and of those 266 have been trained so far.

We've created an easy guide animation video for the causes of damp and mould, how to report it and remedies for residents.

We've improved the information available on our website and created a new website section bringing together all of our available information.

We've updated our damp and mould leaflet which helps people to manage damp and condensation in their homes.

If you want a written outcome of your inspection or copies of any independent report we will be happy to provide this to our residents upon request

Our new process includes a follow up visit after damp remedies have been agreed, to ensure we're proactively checking that all issues have been fixed.

While we've made some effective short-term changes to our approach to damp and mould, we will continue to improve our service to residents, and we'll let you know what changes we make as we make them.

The Beacon Café – open for business

The Beacon Café is now open for the community in North Prospect with a brand-new menu.

The Café is located on the ground floor of The Beacon and is open from 8.30am – 2pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am – 1.30pm on a Friday, offering a full range of hot and cold food and drinks to eat in or take away.

The grab and go selection of food includes sandwiches, crisps, pasties and cakes as well as a fantastic, cooked breakfast – choose from the regular or large vegetarian breakfast or treat yourself to the Beacon belly buster.

As an inclusive space with easy access and free Wi-Fi, The Beacon Coffee House and Café is the perfect spot to get your morning coffee fix to or catch up with some friends over a slice of cake.

The hub comprises three floors of commercial accommodation including office space, a public library, retail space, LARK Children's Centre as well as meeting and community space for everyone to hire and the newly renovated café. There are also three floors of residential accommodation above including 39 flats.

Phil Burgoyne, Commercial Premises and Leasehold Manager, said: "The cafe is located on the ground floor

of The Beacon and provides ample seating, free Wi-Fi and a warm and inviting space. The space also houses an Amazon locker so you can pick up your parcels whilst enjoying a latte or cappuccino."

Kayleigh Robinson, Beacon Officer, said: "We are delighted to open the new Beacon Coffee House and Café as we enter 2023. We hope that this makes a positive difference to the visitors of The Beacon, and we would love to hear ideas about future offers."

The Beacon has one meeting room, a community hall, and a conference suite to suit all uses including classes, parties and charity fundraisers. The rooms have varied capacity with our conference suitable to hold up to 70 delegates.

There are a wide range of groups and classes already making full use of the great spaces, including yoga, child health clinics, karate and slimming world.

If you are interested in hiring a space at The Beacon, please fill out an enquiry form on our website.



Learn with PCH

Did you know PCH offer free courses and activities for our residents?

Don't miss out – sign up to get all the info on the latest courses, as we have just launched our new programme for 2023 with courses including food hygiene, dementia awareness, craft club and First Aid.

For more information, email us on learnforfree@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or call 0800 230 6500.

Free courses for PCH residents



Residents complete One You Programme in partnership with Livewell Southwest



Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) residents living in a Housing with Support scheme in Estover have completed a free four-week health and wellbeing programme delivered by Livewell Southwest.

As a result of the partnership, PCH has been able to offer Leypark Court residents the opportunity to have the One You programme delivered at their residential scheme every week for a month.

The course was delivered by highly skilled health coaches who worked with the residents to create healthy lifestyle goals, as well as to explore ways they could become more active, and offer advice on how to eat well and ways to support their mental wellbeing.

The group programme consisted of an initial 1-1 assessment over the phone, four weekly group classes and a final 1-1 follow-up by phone. The weekly group classes covered an introduction to the programme, and over the next three weeks they discussed nutrition, mental wellbeing amongst other topics.

Our Housing with Support schemes provide our residents with a supportive and comfortable environment that enables independent living. Leypark Court has 33 flats and there are regular social activities organised by the residents for everyone to enjoy, making full use of the communal lounge and kitchen where the One You programme was delivered.

“We feel lucky to have had the opportunity to take part in this programme.”

The residents in attendance were all extremely interested in the information and helpful tips that were given by the health coaches, and Rachael Fox, the Partnership Project

Manager at PCH and Livewell Southwest, who helped to deliver the programme.

Rachael said: “This is an exciting opportunity to build on our work with Livewell. Our new partnership is an opportunity to support our residents’ health and wellbeing in a new way. We hope it will not only make a positive difference to residents lives but also bring helpful changes for staff, developing a better way of working together, benefiting local people through more efficient services”

Shirley and Jeff Lloyd, residents at Leypark Court, couldn’t speak highly enough about the programme and said nothing was too much trouble for the staff who were leading it.

Shirley said: “The whole programme was very informative, and it was great to recap information from a course that we have previously attended.

“After talking about certain plates to help with our portion sizes, I have gone and purchased two for Jeff and I and they are helping very much.

“We think the partnership between Plymouth Community Homes and Livewell Southwest is great, and we feel lucky to have had the opportunity to take part in this programme.”

The residents also shared their ideas about what other events, groups, and courses they feel would benefit residents living at the scheme, and Rachael Fox has taken the feedback away to review and help plan for the future of the partnership.

Helping improve the health of residents

A new partnership has been set up between Plymouth Community Homes and Livewell South West to help improve lives and support more people to live independently for longer in their own homes.

The partnership project started in 2021 when the boards of both organisations met and agreed to jointly fund a new project manager, Rachael Fox, to run the initiative.

The partnership team has identified five key areas of health and wellbeing to look at, including:

- Digital inclusion
- Resolving issues around admission to hospital and returning home
- Health improvement and health inequality in the community
- Improving air quality in our homes
- Developing a strategic plan for supported housing in the city.

Rachael Fox, Partnership Project Manager, said: “This is an exciting opportunity to build on our work with the health service. Our new partnership has the potential to make some positive differences to our residents’ lives, but also helpful changes for staff, and hopefully bring about a better way of working together, benefiting local people through more efficient services.”

Morris Watts from Livewell South West, said: “Plymouth Community Homes and Livewell South West have a great deal in common, we are two organisations with a similar vision and values who want to improve the lives of people.

“This programme is an exciting opportunity for us to pool our collective efforts and energy, find new ways of delivering something special for those PCH residents we jointly support and potentially deliver real benefits.”



Healthy Start Scheme

If you are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk.

If you are eligible, you will be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that can be used in some UK shops. Benefit will be added to this card every four weeks.

The card can be used to buy:

- Plain liquid cow's milk
- Fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables
- Fresh, dried and tinned pulses
- Infant formula milk based on cow's milk

You can also use the card to collect:

- Healthy Start vitamins - these support you during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Vitamin drops for babies and young children - these are suitable from birth to four years old

For more information about how to apply, please visit: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>

If your online application is rejected, you could still be eligible.

Email your details to healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk, call 0300 330 7010 (calls charged at local rate) or go to your local Children's Centre or Wellbeing Hub for further support.



NEW HOMES CREATED IN NORTH PLYMOUTH FOR AFFORDABLE RENT

Eleven new affordable homes are being created at two sites in the north of Plymouth.

The £2.4million project is being delivered by PCH with support from Plymouth City Council (PCC) and Homes England and involves a mixture of 2-bed homes and 1-bed bungalows created for affordable rent by those in registered housing need in the local area.

The houses are being built to a high energy-efficient standard with solar roof panels as well as gas-free heating pumps to maximise energy-efficiency and will also benefit from gardens and parking spaces.

Seven homes are being built on land at St Helens Walk in Whitleigh, which formerly housed some disused PCH garages and had become an area subject to fly tipping.

“THESE HOUSES WILL PROVIDE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES WITH HOMES TO CALL THEIR OWN”

The homes include a mix of modern, energy efficient 1-bed bungalows and 2-bed houses. All of the new homes will be gas-free, with air source heat pumps installed, to help ensure they are more energy-efficient for tenants and have a smaller environmental impact.

Devon-based firm Coyde Construction is managing the building work, which got underway at both sites in February. Work is expected to complete in winter 2023. Gavin Sutton, Senior Project Manager for Development at Plymouth Community Homes, said: “It’s great to see work starting this month on new affordable homes for people in Plymouth to help meet the growing need for good quality social housing in the city. We are grateful for the support of our funding partners and of Plymouth City Council in enabling these two sites in the north of Plymouth to be developed.”

The build has been made possible thanks to £70,000 of funding from the council’s ‘Plan for Homes’ funding pot, £378,000 from Homes England, and surplus land from Plymouth City Council transferred to PCH for a nominal fee of £1.

Councillor Rebecca Smith, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Homes and Communities, said: “I am really pleased that yet again, the partnership between the council and PCH is delivering more affordable housing for the city. We know that this city needs more homes and working with partners like PCH to help us with this makes the task look that little bit easier.”

A further four 2-bed homes are being created on land at Bampfylde Way in Southway, part-funded with Land Release funding from One Public Estate (LGA & Cabinet Office) alongside £40,000 from Plan for Homes and £232,000 from Homes England, as well as the city council transferring the land for a nominal fee of £1.

“These houses will provide people and families with homes to call their own and I look forward to seeing them complete.”

Plumer Gym – free, and good for your physical and mental health

Plumer House has a gym that is free to use for PCH residents and offers state of the art equipment as well as a gym supervisor to help with any questions you may have.

We spoke to regular gym user Terry 81, and his cousin James who has just started using the facilities and has no intention of slowing down...

“Since I’ve been using the gym here I feel so much better in myself”



Terry said: ‘I used the gym before we went into lockdown and I’m really pleased it’s opened again this year for residents to use as I try to make full use of it. I’m here twice a week and I like to do a bit of everything – some walking, the rowing machine, some weights just to mix things up so I’m getting a variety of workouts.’

“It’s a great facility and is so much better than being stuck at home watching TV when I can come here, get healthy and spend time with like-minded people.”

James continues: “Since I’ve been using the gym here I feel so much better in myself. I have no stress or anxiety since I started regularly using the gym to get my exercise – that’s all gone. It makes you feel good, even if you just come and do ten minutes at a time, I’d highly recommend it.”

Plumer House gym is open Tuesday and Thursdays for residents – to find out more call us on 0808 230 6500

THINKING OF MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR HOME?

A home isn't just four walls and a roof, a home is a place that you should be able to relax and feel warm and safe, and from time to time you may want to make changes or improvements to make it feel more your own.

There are some changes you can make in your home without asking our permission, some you'll need to get approval for, and some we aren't able to grant permission for.

We've created this at-a-glance guide to show you the type of changes you can make, but we understand that each home is different so if you have any questions or a change you want to run by us, give us a call on 0800 230 6500 or check out our Alterations Policy on our website.

We do ask that all changes you make benefit or improve your home and the condition of it, and that all work is carried out by professionals to a high standard.

✓ YOU DON'T NEED PERMISSION FOR:

- Internal painting and decorating
- Putting up shelves
- Curtain rails
- Additional phone sockets by provider
- Fixing pictures or mirrors
- Securing flatpack furniture to walls
- Toilet seats

? YOU NEED TO ASK PERMISSION FOR:

- Cat flaps
- External decorating
- Key safe and door entry systems
- Greenhouses, summerhouses and sheds
- CCTV
- External taps
- Kitchens
- Stair lifts
- Connecting a gas cooker
- Fencing or walls
- Replacing flooring or floor coverings
- Satellite dishes and TV Aerials
- Dog kennels
- Fitted wardrobes
- Paving
- Wall mounted TV
- Driveway or hardstanding
- Garden decking
- Ponds
- Plumbing
- Electrical works
- Internal doors
- Security or burglar alarm

✗ YOU CAN'T GET PERMISSION FOR:

- Loft alterations
- External painting of EWI
- Gas works
- Swimming pools
- Cavity wall insulation
- Flag poles
- Complete garden decking
- Under floor heating
- Ceiling fans
- Garages or carports
- Solar panels
- Remove level access bathrooms or wetrooms
- Conservatories
- Patio doors
- Painting tiles or grout
- Laminate or wood flooring in flats that are not ground floor
- Extensions
- Wood burning heaters
- Work which breaches building or fire regulations
- Painting or covering kitchen units, doors and drawers
- External fittings
- Asbestos removal

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A VIRTUAL RESIDENT ADVISOR?



We've created a virtual advisory panel of residents to discuss topics and story ideas so we can get to know what sort of advice, information and support our residents would like to see shared by PCH and ensure we're fully engaged with residents with their regular input into our publications.

residents and social housing providers, as a result of the Social Housing White Paper.

Jay Vickers, Senior Communications Officer, said: "We've set up a great panel of residents to form the

new VRA, with a mixture of people who have a blend of different backgrounds and experiences, all of which we can learn from. They are keen to start and ensure residents' views will feed in to the content of our external publications. It's important

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT RESIDENTS' VIEWS ARE HEARD AND THAT OUR CUSTOMERS FEEL LISTENED TO ABOUT THE ISSUES THAT MATTER."

As well as being involved in ideas for InTouch and our other newsletters, the VRA will serve as a sense check for PCH and our communications – ensuring that we send letters and documents which read well.

that residents' views are heard and that our customers feel listened to about the issues that matter."

The VRA held its first meeting in January and discussed a number of topical issues, looking at the type of content we share with our residents.

If you'd like to find out more or be part of the group email news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or call us on 0808 230 6500 and ask for the Communications and Marketing Team.

The VRA is part of our commitment to the Together with Tenants charter to strengthen the relationship between



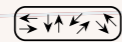
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or visit:

www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

Word search

X I Z R U M B R E L L A W N
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 B X S Q O T R P A T N A C S
 L Z A R K E Y G I M Y W Q S
 O M W C T O F G N E L Y G G
 S D G T Y E C Q B R E E Z E
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 V J E D L E J U R Z X E N H
 U K Z M I R G Z B I C E S S
 F K W T P Z K C B O L N V T



BLOSSOM APRIL NEST GREEN
 BUTTERFLY TULIP BREEZE UMBRELLA
 EASTER BUNNY RAIN GRASS
 THAW ROBIN RAINBOW BUD

Sudoku

Fill in the puzzle so that every row across, every column down and every 9 by 9 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

	1	6				7		
7				5	1	6	8	
	2	8		4		5	1	
8	5			7		1		2
4		1	5	6				
6		2		3	8			
2	4		8	1		9	3	7
	6			2			5	
			3	9	5	2	4	

Recipe round-up

Stuck on what to make for dinner? Here are a few ideas of meals for the whole family that are quick, easy and don't cost the earth.

Cheesy pasta bake

Cheese, pasta and very little else – this comforting recipe will have everyone asking for more.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 500g pasta
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons plain flour
- 500ml milk
- 200g grated cheese

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C and cook pasta to the packet instructions.

Melt the butter in a pan, stir in the flour and stir until smooth. Gradually add the milk, whisking until smooth. Once all the milk is added, bring to the boil and simmer. Add some salt and pepper then turn off the heat and add the grated cheese, stirring until melted. Drain the pasta and add it to the sauce. Top with a little more grated cheese, pop into the oven for around 20 mins until the cheese has turned golden on top.

Classic traybake

Really easy to throw together, this one-pan dish is a great way to use up anything left over in the fridge and cupboard - and packs lots of veggies in too. Here's our favourite version, but feel free to experiment.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- Pack of sausages, some chicken thighs or whatever you fancy
- 2 large peppers, chopped into chunks
- 2 red onions, chopped
- 4 carrots, sliced
- 1 broccoli, cut into florets
- 500g potatoes, cut into chunks
- 1 garlic, crushed
- Olive oil
- Salt
- Pepper

Method

Toss all the ingredients into a baking tray and coat in a little oil, pop in a preheated oven at 180°C and bake for around 35 mins, turning once – until everything is golden and crispy.

Spot 10 differences



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 In Touch, we'd love to hear it.

Email news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

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