

My Home

Sheltered housing newsletter



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Issue 9 | May 2024



Meet Amy, Housing with Support Officer

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring 2024 issue of our My Home Sheltered Housing newsletter.

We hope that you have had a positive start to 2024, despite the unseasonable wet and windy weather. We have our fingers crossed that the weather improves as we head into the summer months.

Within this issue we share about our partnership with the Ocean Conservation Trust, and how our residents at Leypark Court explored the ocean through their virtual reality headsets from the comfort of their communal lounge. Our work with the trust will see this virtual reality experience tour all our sheltered schemes over the coming months, and we'll be encouraging everyone to get involved.

At PCH, safety is always on our mind and building safety is important across our whole housing stock. At the start of this issue, our Housing with Support Officer Amy tells us a little about the work that she carries out on a daily basis to keep our residents and schemes safe. On page four you can also read about the work we do to keep our buildings safe.

Our Digital Inclusion Scheme through our partnership with Livewell Southwest is directly supporting our sheltered residents to get online and it has so far greatly benefited a number of you. Visit page six to find out more about the scheme or contact your Housing with Support Officer if you want to get involved.

Thank you to Gaynor for submitting the extremely timely 'Spot the Difference'. Did you manage to spot all nine of the differences?

We love to hear from you, so please send your stories, photos or ideas to news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk or share them with your Housing with Support Officer.

Helen Ryan

Head of Communities and Housing with Support

Amy Lewis is a Housing with Support Officer currently working at Brock House in the city centre. Amy started working at PCH as a Housing with Support Officer in a temporary contract in August 2022 and was successful in securing a permanent role within the organisation in June 2023.

Before joining PCH, Amy worked in the Care Sector for 11 years, and worked her way up to become a Senior Carer and Supervisor.

Amy said: "After working in the care sector for 11 years, the move to work within social housing has been extremely refreshing and I really enjoy working at PCH as a Housing with Support Officer. In my day-to-day role, it is wonderful to be able to move around, meet residents living in different schemes, see new people and take on new challenges, allowing me to utilise my skills in different areas. I work closely with my colleagues, which allows for a smooth transfer when I move to each of the three different schemes that I work in."

What do you enjoy about working as a Housing with Support officer?

"It can be challenging at times, but I really enjoy working with tenants and learning about their life and background. This allows me to be able to best support them and their needs appropriately and adequately. It is really interesting to build a rapport and learn about their lives so that I can discover what their needs and wishes are, enabling me to support and help to make that happen."





What does a day in your scheme look like?

“On a usual day I arrive at Brock House and firstly I check my emails and overnight alarm and fault calls to ensure that I follow up everything from the day and night before. I make contact with our residents at least once a week, either by scheduled appointments or a visit, and see them around the block or in the office. Visits and contacts are flexible to suit the needs of our residents; however, we do see residents every week to check in and make sure that they’re ok or if they need any additional support. This support will differ from resident to resident which makes the job interesting and each day different.

“Everyone’s support needs are varied and change over time, I could be dealing with a resident recently home from hospital, supporting with access to different health, care or therapeutic services or finding ways to support with correspondence, families, bills, adaptations, translations, digital access, socialising, support groups – the list is endless and some situations are challenging, and I enjoy finding solutions for residents.

“I carry out weekly and monthly building and health and safety checks which includes testing fire alarms, legionella flushing and checking the Tunstall care alarms and communal areas and equipment. I also work on support plans, risk assessments and safeguarding cases with residents. I often make referrals into teams within PCH which include the Financial Inclusion and Tenancy Management Teams, as well as working closely with external organisations such as Adult Social Care, Livewell, GPs, care agencies, Age UK, charities and more. I signpost to services within the community which could include health and wellbeing support or financial support. The housing with support team caters to each tenant in a truly holistic way.

“At Brock House we have a communal lounge and garden, and I often encourage our residents to use it. It’s lovely to see residents socialising and taking ownership of this space, utilising the facilities which are available to them.”

“It can be challenging at times, but I really enjoy working with tenants and learning about their life and background.”

Safety in your scheme

All residents have the right to live in a safe home and at PCH your safety is incredibly important to us. Your Housing with Support Officers work hard every day to ensure that your schemes are safe.

Fire safety – the work of your Housing with Support Officer to keep you safe

At the very start of your tenancy your Housing with Support Officer will check that you can manage around your property and within the scheme itself, how you are with steps and stairs and moving around corridors, as well as managing the communal fire doors. They will guide you through a set of questions about your individual needs and a risk assessment. There will be a checklist to go through, and we ask for information that we'll add to our records so that we and the telecare alarm call monitoring centre know how best to help you in the event of an emergency. Throughout your tenancy we'll be checking in with you and making sure we have updated information.

Housing with Support Officers work in partnership with PCH colleagues who are specialists within different areas including the Fire Safety team and the Legionella team to deliver on their responsibilities to manage, monitor, and update the following:

- PAT testing (electrical tests on appliances in the scheme)
- Scheme risk assessments
- Asbestos register
- Fire equipment maintenance
- Fire risk assessments
- Legionella weekly water testing records

Every week the Housing with Support Officers must undertake some very specific tasks to ensure buildings are safe and properly managed.



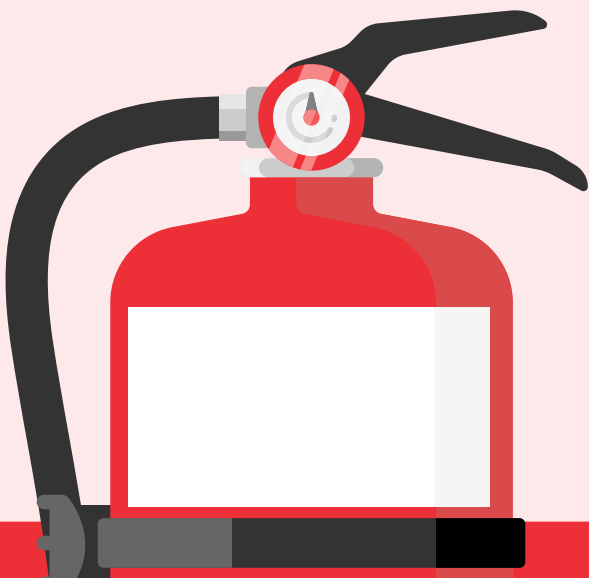
Fire Safety is extremely important in sheltered schemes and the additional duties that your Housing with Support Officers deliver include:

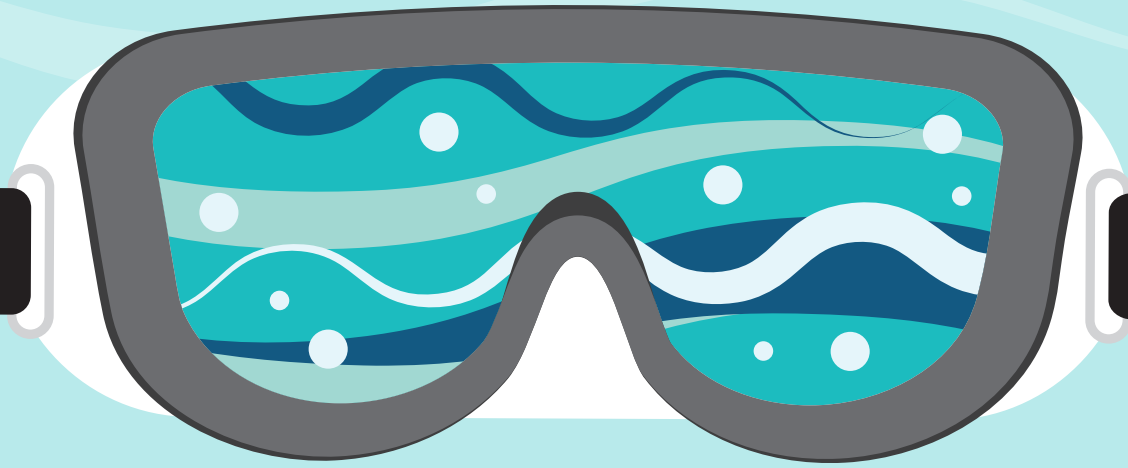
- Being the fire warden for the site
- Checking the alarm panel and reporting and following up on any faults
- Checking fire doors
- Checking fire extinguishers
- Testing the fire alarms every week
- Completing Person Centre Fire Risk Assessments with every tenant
- Conducting fire drills twice a year
- Checking all properties twice a year – to check fire doors, and also to make sure tenants continue to be aware of things like evacuation routes and procedures.
- Keeping the Red Box (information for emergency services) up to date

Some extra ways that Housing with Support Officers help to address fire safety are by arranging visits from Devon and Somerset Fire Safety team, by fitting flashing lights or vibrating pillows for tenants who may not hear an alarm, fitting additional smoke and heat detectors, and more.

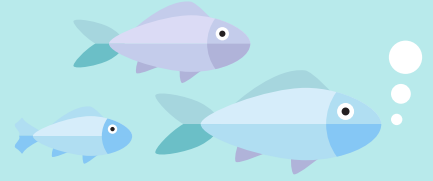
In every sheltered scheme there are communal areas where residents can get together or hold events. The Housing with Support Officers work to a formal risk assessment process, making sure that the right equipment, advice and safety measures are in place so you don't get harmed by any activities.

If you are planning an event or would like to find out more information about any of the above please contact your Housing with Support Officer.





Residents explore the ocean with VR experience day



We have teamed up with the Ocean Conservation Trust, creating an immersive virtual reality journey for residents in our sheltered schemes.

The first session took place at Leypark Court in Estover, and the session allowed residents to embark on a captivating voyage through the ocean's depths. The immersive VR experience offered an interactive exploration of the ocean, some of Plymouth's National Marine Aquarium's tanks, and bustling marine ecosystems.

The virtual reality experience aimed to encourage residents to connect with the ocean and its inhabitants. It helped them learn about the importance of ocean conservation and understand the impact that human activity has on the delicate marine environment. It was an opportunity for the residents to experience the beauty and wonder of the ocean without leaving the comfort of their own home.

The feedback from the residents was overwhelmingly positive. Many said that they felt like they were swimming with the fish and other sea creatures. This collaboration between technology and conservation is just one example of how we can use innovation to raise awareness of important environmental issues and inspire positive change in our communities.

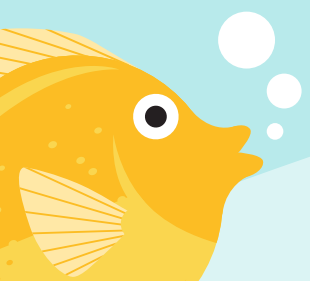
Shirley, a resident at Leypark Court, said: "We really enjoyed the session, it was extremely interesting and I am sure residents at other schemes will enjoy it and benefit from the session just as much as we have!"



Freyja Thomson-Alberts, Ocean Engagement Manager at Ocean Conservation Trust, added:

"We're really proud to be able to bring the Ocean to communities all over the South West using our virtual reality headsets. Providing an opportunity for people to connect with the Ocean and feel the benefits of blue spaces no matter where they are is an immense privilege!"

Sessions are funded by our Health and Housing Project through our partnership with Livewell Southwest, and we will be rolling them out to all of our schemes over the next 12 months.



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 digitally excluded, as well as to those who do not have access to equipment and 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 the differences in local health inequalities and improve the quality of life for PCH residents, so they can live independently for longer in their own homes.

Aims of the scheme:

- 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 with Support Officer.

The Digital Inclusion Scheme has directly supported residents living in sheltered schemes across the city. Hear from two of them below:

"I was finding it difficult to read important documents and information on my mobile phone, especially when accessing my Universal Credit account. My Housing with Support Officer told me about the Digital Inclusion Scheme and put me forward to receive a laptop. Since having the laptop, it has made a huge difference to me. I can now read everything clearly and with ease, allowing me to be more independent with managing my personal accounts." – Robbie, sheltered resident

"I am so pleased to have my tablet as before I had to go to the library which is not always easy so now I can access internet services from the comfort of my own home." – Patrick, sheltered resident

Learn for Free is a free training programme designed for our residents.

Digital drop in

Are you stuck on internet shopping? Want to find ideas and recipes online? Come along with your device and learn some fresh skills and meet friends old and new. Learn how to get the most out of your smartphone, tablet or laptop at a digital clinic.

10am – 12.30pm at Plumer House, Crownhill, PL6 5DH

Thurs 13th June

Tues 9th July

Thurs 15th Aug

Tues 10th Sept

Thurs 10th Oct

Tues 12th Nov

Thurs 12th Dec

For more information contact Ashleigh Knowles on 01752 388051 or learnforfree@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk.

ONE YOU
PLYMOUTH

**WANT TO BECOME
A HEALTHIER YOU?**

Looking for ways to change your life to be healthier and happier? We're a free, local, friendly team within Plymouth, here to help you make those changes!

Contact us via oneyou.plymouth@nhs.net or 01752 437177



From Trash to Treasure:

Janner Men's Shed visits the Reuse Centre



The Janner Men's Shed group is a community group that aims to promote the well-being of men by providing a safe, friendly, and inclusive environment where they can come together to work on projects, share skills, and socialise. Recently, they paid a visit to our Reuse Centre, which is located in Burrington Way, Plymouth.

The Reuse Centre is a part of Plymouth Community Homes, and it is dedicated to recycling and rehoming items from our vacant properties. Donna Vickers, an Environmental Services Charge Hand, accompanied the Men's Shed group on a tour of the Centre. She showed them around and gave them an insight into how the Centre operates.

Donna Vickers, Environmental Services Charge Hand at Plymouth Community Homes, said: "It was an absolute honour and privilege to meet with the lovely group from the Janner Men's Shed today and we are thrilled that we can support them with their amazing projects with many of the recyclable items that come through the Reuse Centre such as unwanted wood, metal and tools. We are looking forward to working with them."



Ryan Huws, Communities Worker at Plymouth Community Homes, said: "The Janner Men's Shed is so pleased that the PCH Reuse Centre can help the group with their work. Today, Louise Turner and Donna Vickers gave us a thorough tour of the Centre and we talked about how we can up-cycle discarded items and make good use of unwanted wood. Shed Members enjoyed the tour and look forward to collaborating with the Reuse Centre".

If you would like to get involved, please speak to your Housing with Support Officer.

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.

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 is working to a 7-day response time for any report of damp and mould.

PCH has now put into place a new triage reporting system to help ensure it can meet its 7-day target 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.

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.

For more information, please visit our website or speak with your Housing with Support Officer who will be able to help.

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, service charges and support charge will be for the year ahead.

Residents in sheltered housing pay a service charge in addition to their social rent. Service charges include the cost of providing communal services like caretaking, cleaning, communal lighting, laundries, lifts, communal lounges and kitchens. Communal service charges are worked out by taking the cost of providing the services and dividing them between all residents.

Some residents in sheltered blocks also pay individual service charges. These are charges for heating or water for example, inside residents' own flat. They are not for communal services.

Residents living in sheltered accommodation also pay a support charge. The support charge pays for the Housing with Support service. This is the 24/7 telecare alarm and monitoring services, and the services provided by the Housing with Support Officers.

PCH does not make any profit on communal service charges, individual service charges, or the support charge, 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 were 7.7%.

This is based on the September 2023 Consumer Prices inflation rate of 6.7% plus 1%.

Service charges this 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.

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?

Plymouth City Council pay some of the cost of providing support and telecare alarms for some sheltered residents as part of their social care commitment to help older people to live independently at home for longer.

Because of this residents may be paying different amounts for the support service depending on their benefit eligibility and when the tenancy started.

The amount that PCC pays towards the support and telecare alarm has not increased for many years and there is a gap between what it costs to deliver the service and what we receive.

We are increasing the charges steadily to gradually close the gap.

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 <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 contact your Housing with Support Officer.

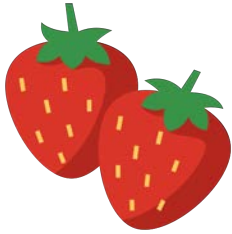


What's on in Plymouth



31 May – 2 June

Flavour Fest
Plymouth City Centre



27 June

Strength of Spirit Games – The Rehabilitation Triathlon
Plymouth Hoe

29 June



Plymouth Armed Forces Day
Plymouth Hoe

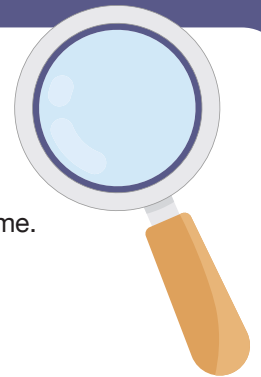
Chronic Pain Café

Chronic Pain Coaching CIC provide meet ups via a pain café for individuals struggling with chronic pain as a result of a long-term health condition, giving the skills, support and knowledge to allow people to independently manage their pain condition as well as encouraging safe movement.

Julie Widdecombe, Director, said: “Sean and I are excited to announce a series of free pain cafes across Plymouth to give community support and help you manage your chronic pain. We have lots of positive comments from people attending sessions and can't wait to meet you.”

For more information on up and coming sessions, speak to your Housing with Support Officer, visit www.thepaincoach.co.uk or email chronicpaincoachinguk@gmail.com.

Maypole Spot the Difference



To celebrate the ending of spring and the beginning of summer, it was decided to erect two maypoles outside the entrance to Plumer House. The only issue was that they had to be the same.

Unfortunately, when they were delivered, they weren't identical.

Can you spot the nine differences between picture A and B?

A



B



Thank you to Gaynor Southerton who designed and submitted this spot the difference puzzle.

PCH Charity Fundraising

Last year...

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.

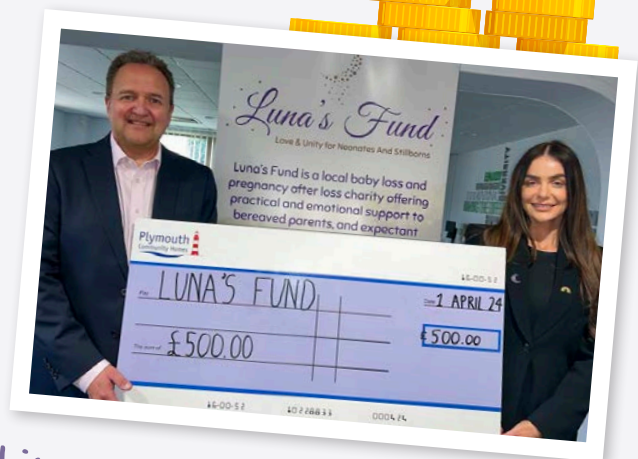
Over the last 12 months, staff have come together to raise an incredible £7,000 for the MND Association and MND Plymouth to ensure that the funds raised can be used to help people in our region.

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.



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, Jerimiah's Journey and many more.



This year...

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 'Plympspirational' feature in InTouch, our quarterly resident magazine, which shared the story of the charity which was 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.

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."

Compliments

Thank you to the tenants who have taken the time to send in feedback about our staff. We really appreciate the time you have taken to send in your feedback and compliments, and it helps us to recognise and celebrate the good work of our staff.

Thank you to my Housing with Support Officers for all your help. I would not be here today without it. - Resident



Thank you to the new Housing with Support Officer, he's brilliant and settling into his new role, is proactive and gets things done. - Resident

BE WARY OF 'NO WIN NO FEE' CLAIMS

It's important to be vigilant when it comes to scammers or organisations who may promise things they can't deliver and leave you out of pocket. Residents are warned to be especially aware of disreputable firms who are actively targeting tenants of social housing associations at the moment, 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.

Anyone can be the victim of a scam. Scams can include: telephone calls, letters, emails, text messages and in person.

**Express your interest in a free scam awareness workshop, coming to a scheme near you soon!
Contact your Housing with Support Officer, or Ashleigh Knowles on 0800 230 6500
or email learnforfree@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk.**



Plymouth Community Homes joins Armed Forces Covenant



Plymouth Community Homes has signed up to support our Armed Forces by signing the Armed Forces Covenant. The momentous occasion was marked by a signing event at Plumer House, hosted by Alex Orr, Warrant Officer 1st Class at the Royal Navy, representing the Army Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant represents our promise to actively uphold and champion the rights and well-being of both current and former members of the Armed Forces, as well as their families. This commitment reinforces inclusivity, support, and community building at PCH.

The signing took place in the presence of several former-military employees within our organisation, including our CEO, Jonathan Cowie (Army), Geoff Smith (Navy), Sue Rutland (Navy), Andy Miller (RAF), Ryan Winsor (Army), Max Mile (Army) and Mike Kewish (Navy). Their first-hand experience and knowledge added depth to our pledge, reinforcing our commitment to creating a workplace that values the contributions and challenges of veterans.

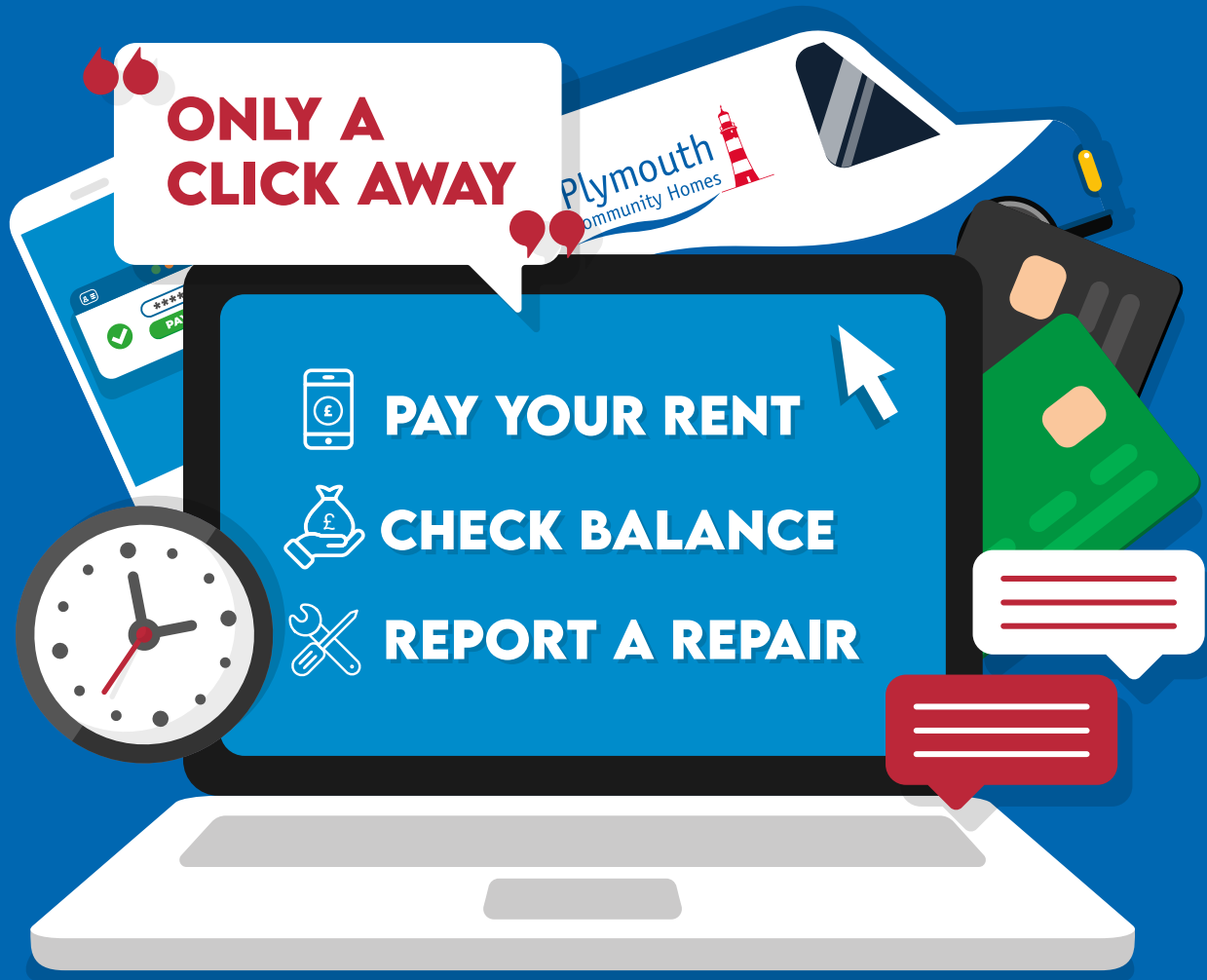
Jonathan Cowie, CEO, Plymouth Community Homes said: "I was honoured to sign the Military Covenant on behalf of PCH this week, alongside former-forces colleagues from the Navy, Army & Airforce. I see the opportunity for PCH to support both those serving today and veterans in two fundamental ways.



"Firstly, to help families who are posted or settle in Plymouth, navigate the housing options, and help signpost where to get help and support. Secondly to be an employer of choice for former forces, recognising their skills, expertise, work ethic and attitude and how this can add huge value to organisations like PCH. Having spent time in the Infantry, I recognise the contribution and growth opportunities for in a career after the armed forces."

If you're a veteran and would like to know how we can help you, please speak to your Housing with Support Officer.

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

Plymouth Community Homes

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