

Welcome to our latest newsletter, which we will be sending out quarterly from now on. We hope you find it useful and informative. We welcome feedback on any of the content as well as any suggestions for future content.

Office information

We have reviewed our office opening hours and can confirm as from the week commencing Monday 29th April 2024 our opening hours will change to;

Monday to Friday 9.00am to 1.00pm.

This arrangement is being trialled and will be monitored for a three month period to see if we are meeting the demand of our customers.

If you have any questions regarding these changes or you have any suggestion for future office opening hours please let us know. Please note tenants can still meet with staff between 1.00pm and 5.00pm but will need a pre booked appointment.

The office will still be fully functional and staff can still be contacted between 9.00am & 5.00pm Monday to Friday in the following ways:

- By telephone: 01900 602906
- Via the tenant portal, accessed through the website www.westfieldha.org.uk.
- The general enquires email enquiries@westfieldha.org.uk.
- For any out of hours emergencies (after 5pm and before 9am Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday) Call 0151 343 2762.

Tenant satisfaction.

Westfield Housing Association (WHA) have been visiting and contacting tenants over the last few months to complete Tenant Satisfaction Surveys.

The survey is based on the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) set by the Regulator of Social Housing. The surveys conducted both online and face to face.

Between January and March 2024, 200 tenants out of 627 responded, which equates to (32%).

The survey gave tenants the opportunity to express why they had answered the questions in the way they had asked for suggestions of what they might change, given the chance.

We would like to say a big thank you to all those who took the time to complete the survey, your input really helps us to shape and improve our services to you.

94% satisfied with overall services provided.

95% said WHA provided them with a well maintained home.

99% said WHA provided them with a home that is safe.

98% said WHA treat them fair and with respect.

What our tenants said..

"Been a fabulous landlord who care about their tenants"

"WHA are great, they really listen and care about their tenants"

Annual rent review

Rent increases have now been applied. These changes followed the annual review of your rent as detailed in your tenancy agreement.

As stated in your rent increase letter, the income from rent is used to provide services and to maintain our homes. In recent years we've experienced considerable, and in some cases substantially higher than inflation increases to our costs of providing these. We want to continue to invest and provide the level and range of services that our tenants want. All income raised through rent increases is reinvested into the company and used toward modernising and improving existing homes and services.

The rent increases and potential impact on tenants were considered by the Board who approved the increases and also the use of our Tenant Enablement Fund to help reduce the potential impact on tenants.

We checked with other local housing providers and those within the Community Housing Associations North West group, (CHANW), which WHA is a member, to benchmark the increase and all applied the full allowable increase, as set by central Government.

Fixed Service Charges - These service charges are set for the year ahead based on the known costs. Any unknown costs are calculated using previous year's accounts for a building or scheme, with an increase to account for inflation. We also consider any information we have about service changes that may happen during the year.

Affordable tenancy service charges - the overall rent and service charge amounts are 80% market value and therefore the 7.7% increase applied.

Tenancy support

We would like to remind you about the support that we can offer to tenants & would advise anyone who thinks they may have issues with their rent and / or service charge payments to contact Andrea, our Income Management Officer who can assist you to access a range of advice & support.

There is also specialist support available from agencies in the community to help with a number of issues including money and debt advice. Andrea will be able to sign post you the correct place, so don't hesitate to contact her on 01900 602906.

Confirming your housing costs

Remember it is a tenants responsibility to notify the relevant authorities of the changes in your rent costs.

Housing Benefit. If you haven't already done so please advise Cumberland Council Housing Benefit department of the changes as a matter of urgency on 0303 123 1702.

Universal Credit. For tenants receiving U.C., you must notify the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) via your online journal or Freephone (inc. mobiles) on 0800 328 5644.

Please ensure you report rent and service charges as separate weekly amounts, and be sure to select "eligible service charges" when prompted if updating costs online.

If you need any advice on the above changes please contact us on 01900 602906.

Community services

Westfield Housing Association provides a very well attended nursery in Workington for children from 3 months up to primary school age called Footsteps.

We have been providing this service for 20 years, supporting families in the area. The service is in high demand and has been rated 'outstanding' in three consecutive Ofsted inspections since 2009.

If you are a tenant of Westfield Housing you could be eligible for half price childcare. Please check with the Footsteps Nursery management Team who can confirm your eligibility.

Please note due to the high demand for this service, the Nursery is currently operating a waiting list.

If you would like information about our Nursery you can call directly on 01900 872011 between 9.00am and 12.00 noon or email enquiries@footstepsnurseryworkington.com



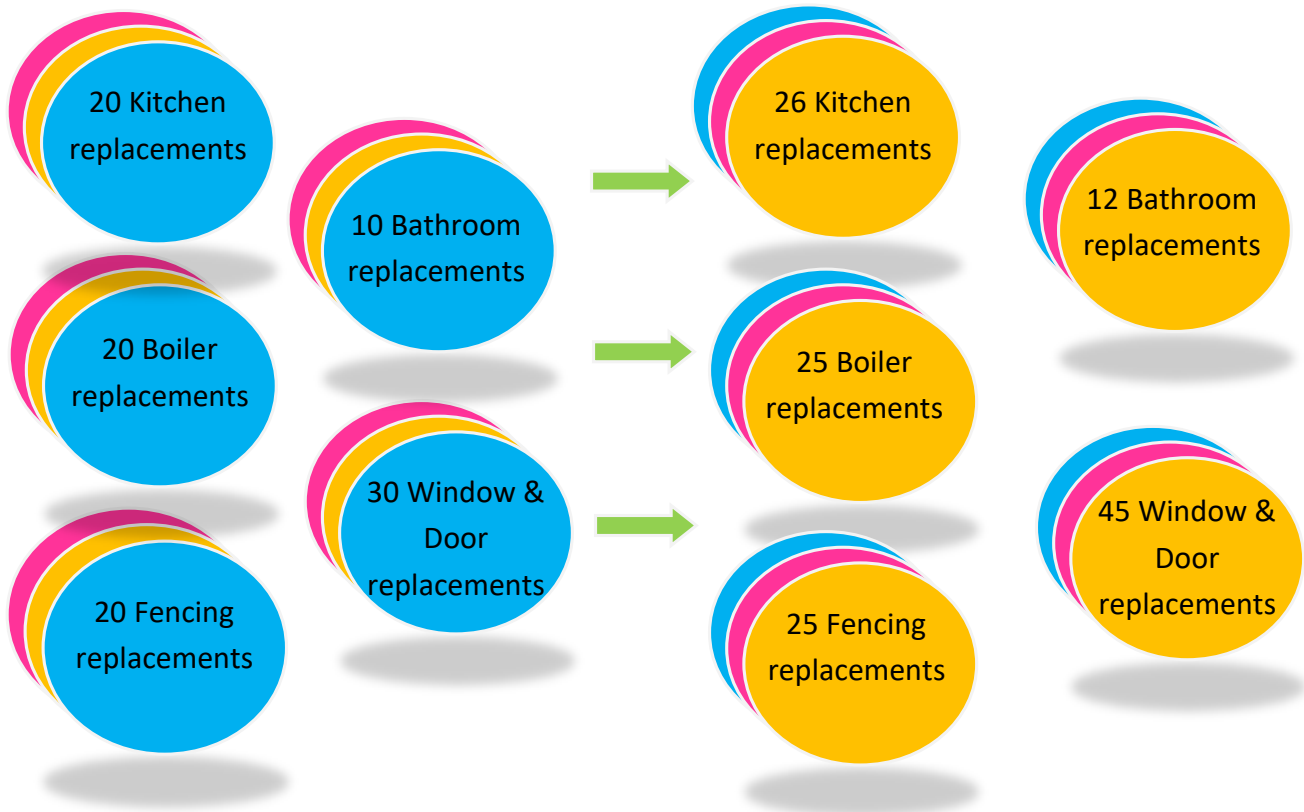
Investment in your homes

During 2021 and 2022 – Opinion Research Services carried out full Stock Condition Surveys on 556 of our homes and we provided information on condition and expected replacement year for components such as kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, windows, doors etc.

We received all of the data from ORS in early 2023 and we have now collated a 30 year programme for all of our properties. Our main priority from 2023-2025 was to replace all components identified as 'poor' or overdue replacement.

The following shows works completed / components replaced between April 2023 and March 2024 and our total budget was £415,000.

We have increased our Planned Programme budget for April 2024 to March 2025 to £500,000. Component replacement as follows and affected tenants will be written to by June 2024:-



Health and Safety

Health and safety is a key aspect as to why we as an Association maintain a safe home for our tenants.

To enable us to meet these requirements and ensure you and your family's safety, it is essential you allow access to our staff and contractors.

From the feedback received from our contractors, no access visits continue to be a real issue, leading to repairs being completed late and also causing difficulties for our contractors planning in other works etc.

It is important to note that if 3 attempts are made to access your home are unsuccessful, unfortunately we have no alternative but to recharge the tenants for the time lost by contractors and we will cancel the repair(s).

The approximate cost of this is £55.00 so it is really important that when reporting repairs, you should let us know the best days/times to attend and always confirm your current mobile number.

If our contractors leave a card, please contact them as soon as you can to arrange a suitable appointment.

Please remember if ringing after 5pm weekdays or weekends and bank holidays, ring our out of hours service on 0151 343 2762.



Creating new homes in your community

Westfield Housing Association is a registered housing association which aims to deliver high quality homes and services to our tenants and the surrounding community to enable people to thrive. We are keen to continue to develop and provide much needed new homes, at a time when there is clearly a national and local housing shortage. This enables people to remain living within their communities nearer to their family/friends for support and reduces isolation. It is important that housing associations can develop and acquire new homes, as this additional income enables reinvestment into existing tenant's homes and communities, as well as creating new energy efficient affordable homes for people wanting to remain in their local area. Over the last 12 months we have developed eleven new homes with a further six bungalows becoming available soon. We have also acquired eight new 2 & 3 bed homes, which are let in conjunction with Cumberland Council.

Our development programme so far

There are now eleven households happily living in the new bungalows on the Westfield estate. Seven of these bungalows are on the old garage site on Windsor Road, now known as Crown Close. This garage site was always full of fly-tipping, bonfires were often lit on the site and there were several cases of anti-social behavior reported. These bungalows have regenerated the neglected area of land and provided modern, energy efficient homes for people in need of level access facilities.

The bungalows have drastically improved the area for those living nearby but also greatly improved the quality of life for the new residents.



From this ...

To this

The remaining six bungalows, which are being constructed on the site of the old welfare on Westfield Drive have been delayed and are now due to be completed in June 2024. The building of these bungalows has again transformed a derelict area of land and greatly improved the appearance of the neighbourhood as you drive on to the Westfield estate.

Westfield is still working towards delivering a second phase of bungalows on the estate too, updates about this phase will be provided in future newsletters.

You said, we listened

We are pleased to announce the start of a new era in our grounds maintenance services across the Westfield estate and other schemes. From Monday 1st April 2024, residents will have noticed the arrival of Tivoli contractors who are delivering the new service.

Earlier this year, we began a procurement exercise to review and re-tender the grounds maintenance service that expired in March 2024. After receiving a lot of feedback regarding this service, the new tender started with a fresh look at what customers wanted against what was currently being delivered. We listened to residents feedback and built the new contract to provide better value for money. To ensure that we got it right, we asked members of our

Customer Panel to help us review the tender documents. We invited 5 local contractors to tender and based on feedback received from residents asked contractors to price for both collection and non collection of grass, we received three submissions.

Tivoli submitted a competitive tender for the contract which meant we could deliver what residents had requested and have the grass collected on each cut.

If you have any queries about the new grounds maintenance service, you can contact us on 01900 602906 or via email at enquiries@westfieldha.org.uk



Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)

In 2023 Westfield Housing was awarded nearly £440,000 of match funding from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) to enhance up to 80 existing properties over a two-year period. A further £440,000 is being funded by Westfield Housing. This will be a total investment in energy efficiency in our existing homes over two years of around £880,000.

We have successfully completed year 1 of the project where 22 households have received energy efficiency improvements and are benefitting from warmer, greener homes including savings on energy bills as well as enjoying warmer and better ventilated homes, which are crucial for health and wellbeing.

The project is part of a national initiative designed to reduce the carbon footprint of social housing homes by installing measures into existing homes 'retrofitting' to improve energy efficiency and follows the government's target of achieving an EPC C rating for all homes by 2030.

In year one, over 90 energy saving measures have been installed into 22 households, including:



Department for
Energy Security
& Net Zero



From the remaining 58 properties a selection will be made and the energy works will be completed over the next 12 months, with most properties expected to receive the benefits of the home improvement scheme well before the colder winter weather takes hold later in the year.



After benefitting from the energy efficiency improvements work, one tenant said...

"My house is so warm now, I haven't got the heating on as much, which will be saving me money and sometimes the children ask for the heating to be turned off! The new windows and doors have reduced the noise from the busy road too, brilliant!"

Another tenant that had energy efficiency improvement work completed recently said...

"I can definitely feel the benefit of the internal wall insulation, the property feels much warmer and will only get better when all the work is complete"



Tenant engagement

Tenant engagement is crucial for a housing association for fostering a sense of community, addressing concerns effectively, and ensuring residents' needs are met. Our Customer Panel plays a vital role in providing feedback and insights to the Association, aiding the implementation of policies in line with the regulatory standards, ultimately ensuring that your voices are heard and your needs are prioritised. Here is a statement from the chair of our Customer Panel.

Hi, my name is Andrew Hardcastle, I am the current chair of the Customer Panel.

The Customer Panel is made up of a group of tenants and several senior staff members from within the organisation.

Many people have asked what the purpose of the group is.

The group was formed 2 years ago, its purpose is to make sure that all aspects of the way in which the Association operate are made accountable while representing the voice of the tenants.

We currently have 8 members and are actively looking to increase this, ideally, we would like another 4 members, and would particularly welcome younger members.

Some of the recent things we have looked at and reviewed are;

- The current maintenance and repairs system, how it works and how it could be improved. Several members also took part in on the annual maintenance and repairs review.*
- The Panel also look at the quarterly performance results; we question the areas where the Association is not performing as well as expected.*
- Another recent discussion related to the current development of bungalows around the estate, where the group studied the plans and asked questions about them. This opened our eyes to the huge demand for level access bungalows in the community.*

Several members of the panel also attended the Community Housing Association Northwest (CHANW) Tenants Conference in Warrington, where we met with other small housing associations and discussed various topics.

As a group we look at funding applications from varying charities/local groups and regularly approve applications for funding from our Neighbourhood Investment Fund.

On occasions members attend WHA Board meetings, and as group we look at the Board's agenda prior to each Board meeting. This gives us the opportunity to raise anything we would like discussed. We are currently setting up a sub-committee to work a lot closer with the Board and attend meetings where required.

Tea and biscuits are always provided, and the banter is great. If you can spare a few hours every 3 months why not give it a try. This really is your chance to have a voice and help shape the way forward in how the Association performs and develops.

Anyone who wishes to meet for an informal discussion about joining please contact the office. I would be more than happy to meet you for a cuppa and crack.

Your voice and opinions really do matter.

Andrew



Please take a look at our Calendar of events insert for up and coming events during 2024

Talk to us

If you have any compliments, concerns, complaints, feedback or questions, please talk to us.

You can contact us in whichever way is easiest for you;

Email; enquiries@westfieldha.org.uk, by telephone 01900 602906, in person by visiting the office, in writing or via your tenants portal.

Difficulty Reading this Newsletter

If you have difficulty reading this newsletter and would it in large print or in another format please contact Julie on 01900 602906