



**WATFORD  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**

**WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TASK  
GROUP**

**Monday, 24 September 2018**

**6.00 pm**

**Town Hall**

Publication date: 14 September 2018

# Agenda

Councillor

Councillors S Cavinder, A Dychton, A Grimston, K Hastrick and A Khan

1. **Election of Chair**
2. **Apologies for absence**
3. **Disclosures of interest**
4. **Introduction and background to the review (Pages 4 - 11)**

The scrutiny proposal form is attached.

Officers suggest that the key questions for the task group to focus on are:

- How are the service charges determined and what are they?
- What are the procedures for residents to request repairs or maintenance, and to make representations to WCH when a poor standard of work is carried out?
- How many requests for repairs are made annually and what are the satisfaction levels of residents?
- What is the process for quality assuring the repairs/maintenance undertaken?
- How are details of repairs/maintenance communicated to residents before and after they take place?
- How is feedback on the performance of contractors sought? How does WCH follow up on the feedback?
- How does WCH ensure that service standards are being maintained, especially in communal areas?

**5. Supporting information (Pages 12 - 49)**

The task group is provided with information reference WCH to assist in the scrutiny process.

The WCH annual report to residents 2017/18 can be found online at the following link: <http://ourannualreport.co.uk/>

Documents are attached as follows:

- WCH rent and service charges explained (pages 12 - 23)
- WCH standards residents can expect in new homes and resident responsibilities (pages 24 - 31)
- WCH service standards for tenancies (pages 32 - 47)
- WCH guidance to residents in providing feedback (pages 48 - 49)

**6. Task group's work programme**

The next meeting of the task group will be Wednesday 17 October at 6.30pm. Representatives from WCH have been invited to this meeting.

The task group are asked to consider the programme for this meeting.

In addition, the task group needs to agree the date of the meeting to follow the October meeting.

Selection of topics and issues for scrutiny by councillors, officers or members of the public

Anyone wishing to suggest a topic for scrutiny must complete Section 1 of this form.

1. Sources

The following are sources of ideas for the work programme:

- Performance indicators, both national and internal.
- Views of Cabinet and Leadership Team especially in relation to policy subjects.
- The Council's surveys, such as the annual residents' survey.
- The Complaints Report which is compiled annually by the Customer Service Centre.
- Service complaints more widely; although individual cases will not be taken up if a large volume of complaints is received about a single issue then it may be appropriate to pursue the topic.
- Reports of external inspections of services.
- The views of the Council's partners.
- Issues picked up by ward councillors in their locality.
- The Council's Forward Plan

2. Outcomes

Success indicators could include:

- Having identified local needs;
- Having evaluated alternative ways of working/how a service could improve and making recommendations to the Executive or the Council's partners;
- Having developed an awareness of any contractual, economic, legal or structural constraints on Council's or its partners approach.

### 3. Criteria

To qualify for consideration the topic must meet the following criteria:

- Affect a group or community of people. Scrutiny will not normally look at individual service complaints.
- Relate to a service, event or issue in which Watford Borough Council has a significant stake.
- Not be an issue that Scrutiny has covered during the last year.
- Not be a planning or licensing issue, or any other matter dealt with by another council committee.
- To match one or more of the Council's current priorities.
- To be feasible and able to be completed within the timescale projected for the work.
- There must be availability within the relevant department/service to support the review.
- Be a topic that members wish to scrutinise.

On completion please return to Sandra Hancock, Committee and Scrutiny Officer

By email – [sandra.hancock@watford.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.hancock@watford.gov.uk)

By post – Democracy and Governance, Watford Borough Council, Town Hall, Watford, WD17 3EX

### Suggestions for topics to be scrutinised – evaluation table

A Member, Officer or member of the public suggesting a topic for scrutiny must complete Section1 as fully as possible. Completed tables will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny for consideration.

<b>Section 1 – Scrutiny Suggestion</b>	
<b>Proposer: Councillor/Officer/Member of public</b>	
<p><b>Topic recommended for scrutiny:</b>  <i>Please include as much detail as is available about the specific such as;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>areas which should be <u>included</u> in the review.</i></li> <li>• <i>areas which should be <u>excluded</u> from the review.</i></li> <li>• <i>Whether the focus should be on past performance, future policy or both.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Included in the review</b></p> <p>Review the service provided by Watford Community Housing (WCH) to local residents.</p> <p>Look at the key issues raised by residents to councillors;</p> <p>Service Charges</p> <p>Performance of repairs conducted by contractors.</p> <p>Value for money for local residents.</p>
<p><b>Why have you recommended this topic for scrutiny?</b></p>	<p>The scrutiny was proposed due to feedback raised by local residents.</p>

**What are the specific outcomes you wish to see from the review?**

*Examples might include:*

- *To identify what is being done and what the potential barriers are;*
- *To review relevant performance indicators;*
- *To compare our policies with those of a similar authority;*
- *To assess the environmental/social impacts;*
- *To Benchmark current service provision;*
- *To find out community perceptions and experience;*
- *To identify the gap between provision and need*

Look at the way in which WCH deals with repairs?

Are residents getting the full service package they expect?

Are contractors providing value for money for the services they provide?

Are the service charges residents payfor, the actual service they are getting?

<p><b>How do you think evidence might be obtained?</b></p> <p><i>Examples might include</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Questionnaires/Surveys</i></li> <li>• <i>Site visits</i></li> <li>• <i>Interviewing witnesses</i></li> <li>• <i>Research</i></li> <li>• <i>Performance data</i></li> <li>• <i>Public hearings</i></li> <li>• <i>Comparisons with other local authorities</i></li> </ul>	<p>Surveys from residents</p> <p>Survey to residents associations</p> <p>Consultation workshops with residents</p> <p>Comment from WCH</p> <p>Performance data from WCH</p> <p>Questionnaire / survey to other social housing providers</p> <p>Survey ward councillors</p>
<p><b>Does the proposed item meet the following criteria?</b></p>	
<p>It must affect a group or community of people</p>	<p>This scrutiny is relevant to all residents of Watford who live in property managed by Watford Community Housing.</p>
<p>It must relate to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake</p>	<p>Relevant to Watford residents.</p>

<p>It must not have been a topic of scrutiny within the last 12 months</p> <p><i>There will be exceptions to this arising from notified changing circumstances. Scrutiny will also maintain an interest in the progress of recommendations and issues arising from past reports.</i></p>	<p>Not in the last 12 months.</p>
<p>It must not be an issue, such as planning or licensing, which is dealt with by another council committee</p>	<p>This is not dealt with by another committee.</p>
<p><b>Does the topic meet the council's priorities?</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify ways to manage the borough's housing needs</li> <li>2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity</li> <li>3. Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities</li> <li>4. Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community</li> <li>5. Secure our own financial future</li> </ol> <p>Reviewing service to Watford residents, which includes members of the community who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.</p>

<p><b>Are you aware of any limitations of time, other constraints or risks which need to be taken into account?</b></p> <p><i>Factors to consider are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>forthcoming milestones, demands on the relevant service area and member availability:</i></li><li>• <i>imminent policy changes either locally, regionally or nationally within the area under review.</i></li></ul>	<p>Needs to be carried out in a timely manner in the new municipal year.</p>
<p><b>Does the topic involve a Council partner or other outside body?</b></p>	<p>Watford Community Housing Residents Associations</p>

<p>Are there likely to be any Equality implications which will need to be considered?</p> <p><i>Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Age</i></li> <li>• <i>Disability</i></li> <li>• <i>Gender reassignment</i></li> <li>• <i>Pregnancy or maternity</i></li> <li>• <i>Race</i></li> <li>• <i>Religion or belief</i></li> <li>• <i>Sex</i></li> <li>• <i>Sexual orientation</i></li> <li>• <i>Marriage or civil partnership (only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination)</i></li> </ul>	<p>All will be covered.</p>
--	-----------------------------

<p><b>Sign off</b>  <i>(It is expected that any Councillor proposing a topic agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee will participate in the Task Group)</i></p>	
<p><b>Councillor/Officer</b>   <i>Asif Khan and Kareen Hastrick</i></p>	<p><b>Date</b>   <b>18/01/18</b></p>

# Agenda Item 5



## Your charges explained

Rent and Service Charges April 2014

This leaflet was published January 2014. Any older versions are now out of date including those with no date stamp.



**This leaflet gives you information about your rent and service charges. These charges are based on the actual cost of providing services to you.**

**We also have a leaflet about the standard of service you can expect from us. To see this, go to [www.wcht.org.uk/standards](http://www.wcht.org.uk/standards) or contact 01923 209009 to request a copy.**

## **What is the difference between rent and service charge?**

Your rent pays for the repairs, maintenance and management of your home. Service charges pay for the cost of looking after shared areas or for personal services you have to pay for such as heating, water charges or insurance.

## **Why are my service charges more this year?**

We introduced charging for services to communal areas last year. To make it more affordable for you, we decided to spread the cost of service charges so that it would take five years to charge you for the full amount. We therefore charged 20% for the first year, and this year it will be 40%. You won't have to pay the full amount until 2017/18.

2013-2014: 20% of the total cost of the service

**2014-2015: 40% of the total cost of the service**

2015-2016: 60% of the total cost of the service

2016-2017: 80% of the total cost of the service

2017-2018: 100% of the total cost of the service

## What is the £12.00 per week cap?

We have decided to cap the increase in the communal service charges to £12.00 (per week). This means that even if 40% of the actual cost is higher, the maximum you will pay this year is £12.00.

However, this cap applies only to the communal service charges which have been introduced since April 2013. It does not apply to any personal charges, such as heating and hot water, support charge or water rates which are excluded from the cap and charged at actual cost. If this applies to you, your total service charge may be more than £12.00 per week.

## Why are my heating and hot water charges not discounted?

These were existing charges that you have always paid for, therefore they are not included in the discount we have applied to the charges we introduced last year.

## How have you worked out my rent increase?

The Trust increases its rents every year using a Government set formula. Almost all social landlords use this formula to set rent levels.

The rent is increased to meet the rising costs of looking after your home. We use something called the Retail Price Index, or 'RPI', to calculate this (RPI is a way of measuring inflation), and then add another half a per cent to that figure.

The April 2014 increase will be based on the annual RPI in September 2013, which was 3.2%.

Additionally the rent will be increased until it reaches a 'target rent' set by the Government, to ensure you are paying the same amount for the same type of property as other social housing properties in the area.

### **The formula that is applied to calculate your rent is:**

3.2% + 0.5% plus up to £2.08 per week.

No one will receive a rent increase that is above this amount.

## **Why do you have to increase my rent?**

We increase our rents to meet the rising costs of looking after your home and it is something we need to do to ensure our viability for existing and future tenants. We are only charging tenants for the services we provide to them.

## **What if I don't pay?**

You are legally obliged to pay for your rent and service charge. If you don't pay we will take court action and you could lose your home.

## **What if I can't pay?**

If you think you will struggle to pay it is important to speak to our financial inclusion team/income team as soon as possible – they can talk through your options.

## **Are service charges covered by Housing Benefit?**

Yes, we have confirmed with the Council that all the communal service charges will be covered this year. The existing personal charges, such as heating and hot water, are not covered by HB.

## **What if I am unhappy with the services provided?**

If you are unhappy with any of our services, please let us know. Speak to Customer Services on 01923 209000 and they will help you. It is very important to us that you are satisfied with our services.

## **How can I get involved?**

When we renew a major service contract we always welcome tenants' views, so do read our resident newsletters and check our website at [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk). We will tell you when contracts are due for renewal and will give details of how you can get involved if you are interested.

The following table shows some of the services you may have to pay for and the services you may see on your statement, but services and charges differ from property to property depending on the services we provide you.

<b>Type of Expense</b>	<b>Explanation of the service charge item</b>
<b>Concierge/security</b>	This includes CCTV and door entry system maintenance and the cost of security patrols.
<b>Rubbish clearance</b>	This is the cost of removing bulky items left or dumped on our estates such as fridges and mattresses. This is different from the waste collection services provided by the council.
<b>Bin area and rubbish chute</b>	This covers the cleaning and maintenance of communal bins, areas and chutes.
<b>Caretaking services</b>	Provided by Trust staff, their duties include litter picking, clearing broken glass, etc.
<b>Cleaning supplies</b>	This covers your share of the costs where these are used.
<b>Cleaning to communal areas</b>	This covers the cleaning to communal areas, especially in blocks of flats
<b>Communal aerial maintenance</b>	The maintenance of communal aerials, primarily in blocks of flats and Independent Living schemes.
<b>Communal TV licence</b>	For the TVs in our Independent Living scheme lounges.
<b>Communal area council tax</b>	Your share of the council tax payable for the shared parts of an Independent Living scheme.
<b>Communal area repairs and furnishings</b>	All repairs to communal areas and replacement or repair of furnishing.

<b>Type of Expense</b>	<b>Explanation of the service charge item</b>
<b>Communal area water rates</b>	Your share of the water rates payable for the shared parts of a Independent Living scheme.
<b>Communal boiler repair and maintenance</b>	This is covered by a contract with PH Jones (part of British Gas) and deals with the shared boilers in some blocks and Independent Living schemes.
<b>Communal keys, locks and fobs</b>	Dealing with access to blocks and communal areas in some blocks and Independent Living schemes.
<b>Communal kitchen maintenance</b>	Dealing with the kitchens in some Independent Living schemes.
<b>Communal Lifeline maintenance</b>	Dealing with regular servicing of Lifeline alarms in communal areas in Independent Living schemes once every six months
<b>Electrical testing and maintenance</b>	The regular testing of the communal electrical installation in accordance with regulations. This includes communal lights, power sockets, power to electric doors etc.
<b>Emergency lighting test and maintenance</b>	Monthly testing of the emergency lighting systems, checking of lights and lamps and any repairs or maintenance necessary. This is required by law to ensure your safety in the event of evacuation in the dark.
<b>Fencing repairs and maintenance</b>	Provided by the Trust staff and contractors.
<b>Fire safety equipment maintenance</b>	Provided by specialist contractors including Honeywell and Chubb and covers testing and repair within four hours for any faults.
<b>Grounds Maintenance</b>	This covers grass cutting, litter picking, hedge trimming and tree pruning on Trust owned land.

<b>Type of Expense</b>	<b>Explanation of the service charge item</b>
<b>Health and Safety</b>	Includes the costs of inspections where necessary and equipment such as first aid kits.
<b>Heating costs</b>	Your share of any communal area or shared heating.
<b>Insurance</b>	Buildings insurance
<b>Laundry room repairs</b>	For our Independent Living schemes.
<b>Legionella testing and maintenance</b>	Dealing with water quality. The work includes testing of the water temperature, testing for bacteria etc and any necessary remedial work such as chlorination and cleaning.
<b>Lift servicing and repairs</b>	This service is provided using a contractor. The contract includes a 24/7 call out for attendance for a lift failure within 2 hours.
<b>Lighting costs</b>	In communal areas including hallways and stairs, provided by Scottish and Southern Energy.
<b>Lightning protection</b>	Primarily for our taller buildings.
<b>Pest control</b>	Provided by Watford Borough Council on a fee basis when required.
<b>Refuse collection</b>	Provided by Watford Borough Council, primarily for some of the Independent Living schemes, for communal bins.
<b>Water coolers</b>	Provided by Angel Spring in some Independent Living schemes.
<b>Window cleaning</b>	This includes cleaning communal windows in blocks.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## If I am on the ground floor, why should I pay for a lift?

The lift is one of the services everyone in the block has access to. Whether you choose to use it or not all residents will share the cost of communal services.

## If I don't use the laundry, why should I pay for it?

The laundry is available to all tenants in the block(s) as a communal service so whether you chose to use it or not it is a service you share and pay towards.

## I cannot see that our windows are cleaned, why should I pay?

The contractors may come at times that you are away from your home so you may not see the service provided. We do require contractors to inform the Site Officer or a resident that the service has been provided so this can be checked.

If you are unhappy with the services provided, please let us know. Speak to your Estate Services Officer (or Support Worker if in Independent Living scheme), or contact Customer Services on 01923 209000 and we will inform the relevant team or person responsible to ensure they are aware.

If you want to leave feedback you can do this online at [www.wcht.org.uk/feedback](http://www.wcht.org.uk/feedback), via email to [feedback@wcht.org.uk](mailto:feedback@wcht.org.uk) or over the phone to any member of staff.

## **My service charge statement has services I don't even want.**

Individual residents cannot 'opt out' of paying the costs of services that are being provided. There are contracts that are in place to provide these services, but we will inform you when they are up for renewal and you can let us know what level of service you want us to provide. The Trust will consult on service charges and will only introduce or cancel a service if at least 70% of tenants affected agreed. However, we may have a legal duty or there may be health and safety reasons to provide certain services and tenants will not be able to change this.

Or you could get involved the next time a major contract comes up for renewal to shape the level of service you receive and help choose contractors. Check our resident newsletters and our website at [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk) to find out when our contracts are due to change and how you can get involved if you want to.









**Watford Community Housing Trust**  
Gateway House, 59 Clarendon Road  
Watford, Hertfordshire  
WD17 1LA

**t:** 01923 209 000  
**e:** [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk)  
**w:** [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk)

Watford Community Housing Trust is registered in England as a charitable Industrial and Provident Society.  
(Registered Number 30183R) Homes and Communities Number: L4495 VAT Registration Number: 911 5648 32



[www.facebook.com/  
WatfordCommunityHousingTrust](http://www.facebook.com/WatfordCommunityHousingTrust)

A banner for Language Line services. It features three icons: a human ear, the letters "ABC" with a magnifying glass over the "C", and a telephone handset. The text "Language Line services" is written in a serif font. Below the icons is a dark red bar with white text: "For any of the above services please contact 01923 209000".

Language Line  
services

For any of the above services please contact 01923 209000



# Standards you can expect in your new home

Information on the condition  
of your property

This leaflet was published November 2013. Any older versions are now out of date including those with no date stamp.



Better homes **friendlier communities...**  
- together

## **This leaflet set out the standards you can expect from the Trust and your responsibilities in maintaining your home along side your Terms and Conditions.**

Please remember once you have moved into your new home, you become responsible for certain minor repairs, you can find out more about these on page 7.

Our aim is to make certain your new home meets the standards below. However, to ensure we let empty properties as quickly as possible, we will sometimes arrange to complete part of the work after you have moved in and at a time convenient to you.

### **Standards you can expect**

#### **General**

- Your home will be wind and weather tight and structurally sound.
- Rubbish, old furniture etc will be cleared from the rooms, loft, and outhouses.
- If there is a garden, it will be cleared of any rubbish.
- Gas and electric safety checks will be carried out (although the gas supply will need to be turned on when you move in).
- Fixtures and fittings will meet health and safety standards and other relevant regulations.

## Bathroom

- All sanitary ware will be clean and working properly.
- Any drips or leaks will be repaired.
- All sanitary fittings will be sealed where they meet floors and walls.
- All drains will be clear and free flowing.
- If there is a shower installed in the property, it will be in working order. (Please note that if the shower has been put in by a previous tenant, rather than the Trust, we may not maintain or replace it.)
- If there is a level access shower, we will not replace it with a bath



## **Kitchens**

- There will be a gas or electric cooker point.
- Worktops and units will be clean and serviceable.
- Any cracked or broken tiles will be replaced.
- All sink units and junctions with worktops will be sealed.
- All cupboard doors and drawer units will be in working order.
- Any drips or leaks will be repaired.
- All drains will be clear and free flowing.

## **Floors**

- Kitchen and bathroom floors will have a waterproof floor covering.
- Loose flooring timbers will be securely fixed down and badly warped boards replaced. All skirting boards will be in a sound condition.

## **Doors, windows and frames**

- All doors and windows will open and close correctly. All ironmongery and fittings will be in full working order and we will provide keys to window locks.
- Architraves, frames, linings, mouldings etc will be in a sound condition.





### **Walls**

- Visible areas of defective plaster will be replaced, but will not be decorated.

### **Ceilings**

- Fibreboard ceilings will be replaced with plasterboard and a skim coat.

### **Safety**

- All stopcocks, gate and service valves will be in working order.
- Gas appliances will be in sound working order and properly ventilated with a completed 'gas safe' certificate.
- Any gas fires installed by a previous tenant will be left in place so long as they fully comply with current safety regulations.
- Electrical circuits will be tested and all appliances (including smoke alarms, where these are 'hard-wired') will comply with current standards. An NIEC certificate will be issued.
- All handrails, balustrades, staircase fixtures and risers will be securely fixed.

- Projecting canopies and porches will be in sound condition.

### **Space and water-heating**

- All space and water heating appliances will be in working order and a gas and electric certificate supplied for all appliances.

### **Decorating**

- No internal decorating will be carried out by the Trust.

### **External**

- Back and side gates will be in working order and all other gates left in a safe condition.
- All boundary fencing will be safe and secure.
- Paths and patios will be in a safe condition.
- Permanent stores/sheds and garages that are attached to the main building will be in a safe condition. Any freestanding/temporary sheds/greenhouses etc will be your responsibility.
- Any ponds in the garden will be drained and filled, unless you accept responsibility for their future safety.

### **Locks and keys**

- New cylinder locks will be fitted to external doors and two keys will be provided for each lock. There is a charge for additional or for replacement keys.

## **Accepting the property**

### **Non-standard items**

You will be given a list of any non-standard items you have agreed to accept and maintain, and this will be part of your tenancy agreement (e.g. conservatory, greenhouse, shower, etc). This means that when you sign up for your tenancy you will be agreeing to maintain and repair these items yourself.

### **As a tenant your responsibilities will include:**

- Allowing the Trust access to your home for including and not limited to the following:
  - annual gas safety check
  - repairs
  - improvements
  - property surveys
  - asbestos survey
  - water testing
  - electrical testing

Please note that this is part of your Terms and Conditions and failure to comply could breach your tenancy agreement.

- Keeping your home and garden in a well maintained condition.
- Getting the Trust's written permission before making improvements to your home.
- Reporting any repairs needed to your home or communal areas.
- Paying for the repair of any damage you, those living with you or your visitors cause.

**If you wish to discuss any of these standards or feel that they have not been met, please contact us on 01923 209 000.**

### **Mutual Exchange**

If you move in with a mutual exchange then you accept the property as it is and will be responsible for making sure that it is at the required standard.



**Watford Community Housing Trust**  
Gateway House, 59 Clarendon Road  
Watford, Hertfordshire  
WD17 1LA

**t:** 01923 209 000  
**e:** [customerservices@wcht.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@wcht.org.uk)  
**w:** [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk)

Watford Community Housing Trust has charitable status. It is an Industrial and Provident Society registration number 30183R and registered with the Homes and Communities Agency number L4495.



[www.facebook.com/  
WatfordCommunityHousingTrust](http://www.facebook.com/WatfordCommunityHousingTrust)

A banner for Language Line services. On the left is a blue ear icon. In the center, the letters "ABC" are displayed in a bold, blue font, with a magnifying glass icon over the letter "C". On the right is the Language Line logo, which consists of a stylized blue globe with a network of lines. Below these icons, the text "Language Line services" is written in a blue sans-serif font. At the bottom of the banner, a dark blue bar contains the text "For any of the above services please contact 01923 209000" in white.



# Our service standards

Our promise to you



watford  
community  
housing

We understand how important it is for customers to know what they can and can't expect from us.

We've created this booklet to set out clearly our promises to you, our tenants.

# Our service standards

Our customers have told us that the most important thing about our services is that they are consistent. By making these standards available to you, and by highlighting how you can challenge us where we have not met them, we can help to ensure that everyone receives the best service possible every time.

This set of standards has been put together after consulting with our tenants, our Gateway Membership Team and our Board.

## This document will tell you:

- What we will do for you
- How we will do it
- What we expect from you in return





# Service standards for your tenancy

## Ensuring the standard of your home

- We will ensure that your home meets the government's Decent Homes standard and that any improvements that need to be made are in line with our Property Standards policy.
- Where we use contractors to carry out works, we will ensure they meet these service standards and any additional requirements agreed with tenants involved in the contract procurement process.

## Repairing your home

- You can report non-urgent repairs 24 hours a day using our website and we will respond to you during the next working day.
- You can also report repairs, for free, by calling 0800 218 2247.
- We will offer you a choice of appointments (except in emergencies)
  - Morning (8.00am – 1.00pm)
  - School hours (9.30am – 2.30pm)
  - Afternoon (12.00pm – 4.00pm)
  - Evening (Thursdays until 7.00pm)
- We will aim to complete the repair on our first visit. Where this is not possible we will let you know when it will be finished. We will make you aware of the dates and times of follow-up appointments by telephone, text or letter.

- If we miss an appointment and this causes an inconvenience we will abide by the terms of our Tenant Compensation Policy, which outlines what compensation you may be entitled to.
- We will resolve repairs within the timescales detailed on our website. There are different timescales for different repairs, depending on their urgency.
- It is a legal requirement for us to carry out annual gas safety checks at your property, as well as smoke alarm checks in some cases. We will arrange an appointment with you and you must then give us access at the arranged time.

The annual gas safety check is to ensure your safety and it is a requirement of your tenancy agreement that you allow us access to complete the check. You will be charged if we have to take legal action to gain access.

We will fix any faults with hot water and heating systems within five working days. During the colder months between October and April, we will fix faults that leave you without heating within 24 hours. For households where someone is elderly, has a disability or a chronic illness, or there are children under the age of five, we will fix heating faults within 24 hours at any time of year.

continued overleaf

## Managing your tenancy

- We will visit your home, without notice, usually at least once every five years to carry out a tenancy audit. We will respond to any reports of fraud and breaches of tenancy resulting from this audit within five working days.
- We will provide or recommend support to help you manage your tenancy if your circumstances change or you're facing difficulties. We will only seek eviction as a last resort.

## Rent and service charges

- We will set your rent in accordance with your tenancy agreement and, where applicable, in line with the Rent Standard set by the government regulator.
- We will send you a rent statement every six months and you will be able to access your balance online 24 hours a day through our online portal.
- We will send you an estimated service charge bill in February each year and an 'actual' service charge bill in September, confirming the final cost of the services we have provided.
- We will calculate charges carefully to make sure that the estimated bills and the actual bills are as close as possible.
- We will ensure that leaseholders are informed before we enter into any contract that would cost £100 per year, or before we commission any major works that a leaseholder would be required to contribute more than £250 towards.

- We will make paying your rent as convenient as possible and will list the range of ways that you can pay on our website and rent statements.
- We expect you to pay rent in advance of when it's due. If you have any difficulty paying your rent you are obliged to contact us as soon as you know there is a problem, and to work with us to find a solution that works for everyone.

## Visiting your home

- We will always respect you and your home.
- Our staff will wear uniform or an identity badge and explain the purpose of their visit before entering your home.
- For pre-arranged appointments we will let you know we are coming by calling you in advance, or sending reminders by text, letter or email.
- We will always leave your home tidy after completing inspections or repair jobs. Where appropriate we will also ensure that our staff wear shoe covers to protect your carpets and flooring.
- We will respect any religious or cultural requirements that you may have in relation to visitors in your home. We would ask that you let us know about them in advance so that we can record them on our systems and respect them consistently.

continued overleaf



## Neighbourhood and Community standards

- We will work with partners (such as the police, fire service and local charities) to try to make our neighbourhoods safer. We will give you clear timescales and an action plan when you report incidents of anti-social behaviour or hate crimes.
- We will keep to any timescales and action plans agreed with you and we will contact you before closing your case to ask how satisfied you were with how we handled it.
- We will encourage residents to be good neighbours by supporting activities that make our communities friendlier.
- We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour and will have fair policies and procedures to manage issues in a consistent manner. We expect you to adhere to these as well.
- We will visit and inspect neighbourhoods and communal areas every six weeks to check that the communal areas are up to standard and to identify any issues.
- Residents and local councillors are invited to take part in estate inspections which will happen every three months. Dates will be agreed in advance. After the event the feedback and action plans will be posted on our website.

- We will cut the communal grass areas up to 15 times each year (between March and October), weather permitting. We will litter-pick the communal grounds around our blocks every two weeks.
- We will clean communal blocks every week and ensure that the lists of agreed cleaning dates and cleaning tasks are displayed in each block. Windows in communal halls and landings will be cleaned every three months.

## Tenant involvement and empowerment

- We will consult with residents if we change our Service Standards.
- We will offer you choices when we improve your home or change the services you receive. We will publish an 'Involvement Menu', setting out how you can help to improve and influence the services we offer.
- We will only spend money on projects that we believe benefit our tenants directly.
- We will have a dedicated budget of £295,000 to deliver projects that enhance communities and help to improve tenants' lives.





# What we expect from you

## Your responsibilities as a tenant

- We expect you to keep to the terms and conditions of your tenancy and we need you to let us know if you are struggling or if your circumstances have changed.
- When we agree an appointment with you we would like you to:
  - keep appointments and provide access to your home as agreed
  - reply within 48 hours when we request appointments from you
  - notify us, or our contractor, as soon as you know you cannot keep an appointment
  - ensure that an adult (over 18) is in the property at all times when we visit and that any children are supervised
  - keep your pets under control and away from work areas
- get ready for our visit by making sure that any areas where we may be working are clean and clear. This may involve:
  - emptying kitchen cupboards
  - removing shelving, mirrors, curtains, ornaments and other loose fittings
  - moving valuables or small appliances from the work area
  - cleaning items such as toilets before the operative arrives
  - removing any rubbish or pet waste from garden areas
  - keeping access points such as doors and alleyways clear.

# What you expect from us

## Governance and financial viability

- We will have a set of rules that sets out how we operate and the ways that tenants can be involved in helping us to run and holding the organisation to account.

## Scrutiny

- Scrutiny of Watford Community Housing will be led by tenants on the Gateway Membership Team and they will report the outcome of any activities to our Board.
- We will provide financial statements and an annual report each September at our Annual General Meeting, so you can see where your money has gone and how it has benefited tenants and the wider community.

## Getting back to you

- We will acknowledge written correspondence (including emails) that require a response within two working days. We will adhere to the rules laid out in our Complaints Policy.
- We will reply to all letters within five working days of their receipt. If we cannot provide a full response within that time, we will tell you why and keep you fully informed at all times. We will make it clear what we can do and when we will do it.
- Calls should be directed through our call centre, but we understand that you will sometimes want to speak to a specific staff member. We will ensure that our staff tell you if they are out of the office. All phone messages will be returned within two working days of the staff member getting back into the office.
- In some circumstances a tenant may request to have a face-to-face meeting or a home visit. If appropriate we will ensure that you are offered a choice of appointment times that suit your needs.

continued overleaf



## Our staff

- Our staff are expected to demonstrate the following behaviours:
  - We're customer-focused
  - We work together
  - We act with integrity
  - We innovate
- We will:
  - Act with integrity. We will be courteous, helpful, open and honest in delivering our services to reflect our values.
  - Make our actions customer-focused. We will be welcoming, professional and friendly in our approach.
  - Work together – to build relationships and interact effectively.
  - Be positive about change, identifying opportunities to improve or simplify the way things are done
  - Be well-informed, so that we are able to help you.
  - Treat everyone fairly and equally, with respect and dignity.
- We will make sure that individual staff members are thanked if you tell us that you have received particularly good service from them.
- We will also pass on your feedback to managers and staff when we get examples of poor service, so that our staff can improve their customer service style and the way they are working.

## Accessing our services

- We realise that each customer has individual needs and we will use our customer systems to record your requirements so that help can be accessed when you need it.
- We will inform residents in hostels, independent living and flexicare homes when staff will be on site and available to speak to. We will use notice boards in communal areas in these homes to promote messages about how to access our call centre and website.
- Our website and self-service portal is available 24 hours a day. Our office and call centre is open from Monday to Friday during the hours of 8.30am – 5.30pm. Our social media will be monitored during working hours. We will advertise the exceptions to this (such as Bank Holidays) on our website and through call centre messages.
- Outside of normal working hours we will provide an out-of-hours service to report emergency repairs and health and safety matters.
- We will use range of communications methods including letters, social media, texts and our website to share information in unforeseen situations or when we need to communicate with a large number of you at any one time.





**watford**  
community  
housing

Watford Community Housing  
59 Clarendon Road  
Watford, Hertfordshire  
WD17 1LA

T: 0800 218 2247  
E: [enquiries@wcht.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcht.org.uk)  
[www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk)

Watford Community Housing is a registered society (30183) and is regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency.



Freepost - RRXH\_LZUR\_LKHG  
Watford Community Housing Trust  
Gateway House  
59 Clarendon Road  
Watford  
Hertfordshire  
WD17 1LA

## External resolutions

We will always try to resolve things for you as early as possible. If you remain unhappy after our attempts to do so you can refer your complaint to an external 'designated person' in an attempt to seek a local resolution.

Any designated person(s) can contact us to discuss your complaint further on your behalf as well as offer fresh ways of looking at the complaint if this may help to resolve matters locally. They may also refer your complaint on to the Housing Ombudsman for further investigation if they agree with you that we have not resolved your complaint satisfactorily.

- i** A designated person could be a councillor, any MP or a recognised tenant panel (please note such tenant panels must have agreed a code of conduct with us and have been entered by us onto the Housing Ombudsman's register as a recognised designated person).
- i** If you would rather not seek a local resolution you may contact the Housing Ombudsman directly after our formal review; however they ask that you allow 8 weeks before doing so

The Housing Ombudsman may decide not to consider your complaint if you have not been through our internal complaints procedure first, if you have not attempted to reach a local resolution or if you have raised a legal dispute.

The Housing Ombudsman service is an independent body which deals with disputes between registered landlords and their customers. You can contact the Ombudsman in the following ways:

**Address:** Housing Ombudsman Service, 81 Aldwych,  
London, WC2B 4HN

**Tel:** 0300 111 3000

**Email:** [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## Making sure our feedback process works well

We want to make sure that all of our customers are heard when they want to give us feedback. We aim to treat people fairly, with respect and to take personal ownership whenever they have views on our service.

If you think that we could do things differently when we manage the feedback you give us, please let us know - that kind of feedback is really important too!



Watford Community Housing Trust  
Gateway House, 59 Clarendon Road  
Watford, Hertfordshire  
WD17 1LA

t: 01923 209 000  
e: [feedback@wcht.org.uk](mailto:feedback@wcht.org.uk)  
w: [www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk)



**Your Feedback**  
what matters to you  
...matters to us

This leaflet was published March 2013. Any older versions are now out of date including those with no date stamp.



## What happens when you give us feedback?

When you let us know that you have had a problem with our service, we will always try to fix things for you straight away. If you are happy to let us have 24 hours to try and resolve matters, we will do so and this would be recorded as an **informal concern**.

Whenever this happens we will let you know what we plan to do and agree a timescale with you if it could take longer than 24 hours.

**Our aim is to resolve your concerns at the earliest opportunity, ensuring good communications, so that you are satisfied with the resolution.**

If we don't feel we can solve a problem immediately we will advise you so that you can make a formal complaint if you would like to. You can be assisted by a friend or relative at any point in the formal process if you feel this would help you, all we need is something on file to confirm who you are happy for us to speak to.

If you give us a compliment or even a comment or suggestion, we will treat this with equal importance and ensure we learn from it just as we would a complaint. We will record your feedback and let those involved know what they have done well or where we could perhaps look at things in a different light.

## All of your feedback is important!

We will take ownership and use the feedback you give us to improve. We will also let you know what we have done to improve, using our website, newsletters and other communications.

## Giving us positive feedback, comments or suggestions

**If you want to tell us about something we have done well, or if you want to make a comment or suggestion, you can do this in several ways:**

- Online:** via our website ([www.wcht.org.uk](http://www.wcht.org.uk))
- By email:** [feedback@wcht.org.uk](mailto:feedback@wcht.org.uk)
- By telephone:** to any member of staff (01923 209 000)
- In person:** to any member of staff
- In writing:** Gateway House, 59 Clarendon Road, Watford, Herts, WD17 1LA
- Surveys:** complete satisfaction surveys to let us know what you think

## Giving us negative feedback

**If you need to give us negative feedback one of our staff will:**

- Contact you as soon as possible to discuss and resolve your concerns within 24 hours, or within an agreed timescale
- Aim to fully resolve any formal complaints we receive within 10 working days and respond to you in the most appropriate way (for example if you raise your concerns by email, we will respond by email)
- Confirm with you that you are happy with the resolution of your concern or complaint

## Formal complaints

If it's the first time you have raised a formal complaint about an issue, a member of the management team will carry out a formal investigation and look to resolve your complaint (this could be a team leader, manager or Head of Service, but will always be the best placed person to resolve your concerns at the first time of asking).

In some situations if we are unable to resolve your concerns straight away, you can ask for your complaint to go to a formal review. This could involve the complaint being reviewed by a panel of tenants, or by one of our Directors, it's up to you.

- i** A review by a tenant panel will take place within 20 working days and a resolution put in place within a further 10 working days.
- i** A Director reviewing a complaint will look to fully resolve the complaint within 10 working days.

During the formal review the tenant panel or director will only be able to consider concerns that you raised during your initial formal complaint. If there are new or not directly related issues you wanted to raise, these could be considered as a separate complaint.

To request a formal review all that you have to do is to let us know you remain unhappy, explaining why and what you want us to do. You can do this by either notifying the person who dealt with your complaint directly, or by contacting our Feedback Administrator.

We will not consider a complaint to be closed unless we have heard from you directly that you are happy with the resolution.

## Help is at Hand!

If you need any help using our feedback process, especially if you feel you want to make a complaint, please contact our Customer Service Centre on 01923 209000.

## Customer Feedback Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel no: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Preferred method of contact:**  
(please tick one) Postal:  Telephone:  Email:

**Relationship to Trust:** Tenant:  Leaseholder:   
Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Details of your feedback:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What type of Feedback is this:** Compliment:  Comment/Suggestion:   
Informal Concern:  Formal Complaint:

**Have you told us about this before:** Yes:  No:

**If yes, who did you tell?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What would you like us to do?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_