

WINTER 2016

Word *on the street*

NEWS & INFO FOR CO-OP HOMES' CUSTOMERS

co-op

H O M E S



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Welcome

Hello everyone! I'd like to introduce myself to you.

My name is Neil Tryner and I'm the new Managing Director of Co-op Homes. You will all be aware of the fantastic work done by my predecessor, Sue Philpott, in building Co-op Homes to be an established and highly respected organisation in the community housing world. It is my privilege to join the team and further grow and develop Co-op Homes to reach even greater heights.

Having moved to London from Birmingham to take up this role I am amazed by the high quality of our homes and the commitment and passion of my new team. I am looking forward to meeting as many people as I can and hearing your views on ideas to help us get even better.

My mission is to build on the great history of the organisation and make sure our future service offer to customers is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. The challenge for everyone to find good quality affordable homes is pressing across the country;

in London and the South East this pressure is even greater. I want to make sure that we support as many people as we can and ensure our landlord offer meets your needs and those of future generations.

I hope that in this newsletter you will find some features that are of interest to you whether you are one of Co-op Homes' residents or a member of our client co-ops and I am grateful to members of our Customer Focus Group for helping us put this together.

I am always keen to get feedback on our work so if you'd like to comment on this publication, on the work of Co-op Homes or would like to get more involved to help me make sure our services stay truly customer focussed, please don't hesitate to contact me personally at neil.tryner@coophomes.coop or by telephone via **020 3166 2608**.

In the meantime I wish you a happy Christmas and New Year from me, our Board, and all the team!



Other newcomers

We welcome Zoe Levine to our team. Zoe is joining our Customer Adviser team and will be focussing on finance, repairs and other general housing management tasks. Zoe brings with her a wealth of experience from her days in the RHP rents team.

We also give a warm welcome to two new housing co-ops. Brandrams Wharf Housing Co-operative residents live in a Grade II listed building which was formerly a derelict warehouse on the banks of the River Thames in Rotherhithe. Now restored and brought back into use it provides 34 units for 57 resident members. Co-op Homes is providing a full management service to Brandrams and is pleased to welcome them on board.

We also welcome residents of Flame Housing Co-operative, which is a block of four houses with 16 units in New Cross, London. Co-op Homes will be helping Flame with rents, administration and governance.

Making IT better for you!

Works have started on making our services more user friendly. A major plan is to ensure that our website contains information that you want to see at a time which suits you. Our website at www.coophomes.coop is available 24 hours a day seven days a week and we are working towards giving you more interactive solutions to common problems. One of our objectives is to create a new page containing answers to subjects relating to your home and your tenancy. This will include things like:

- What to do if you notice an abandoned property
- Whether you are allowed to make alterations to your property
- What “essential” repairs are
- What repairs you are expected to carry out yourself
- Useful “how to” guides.

We also plan to introduce a text messaging service in the New Year for reporting repairs which will keep you in the picture better and make the whole repairs ordering procedure quicker and more relevant.

If you have ideas about how we could improve our website to better meet your needs, we'd love to hear them - contact nikki@coophomes.coop.



Let's get digital

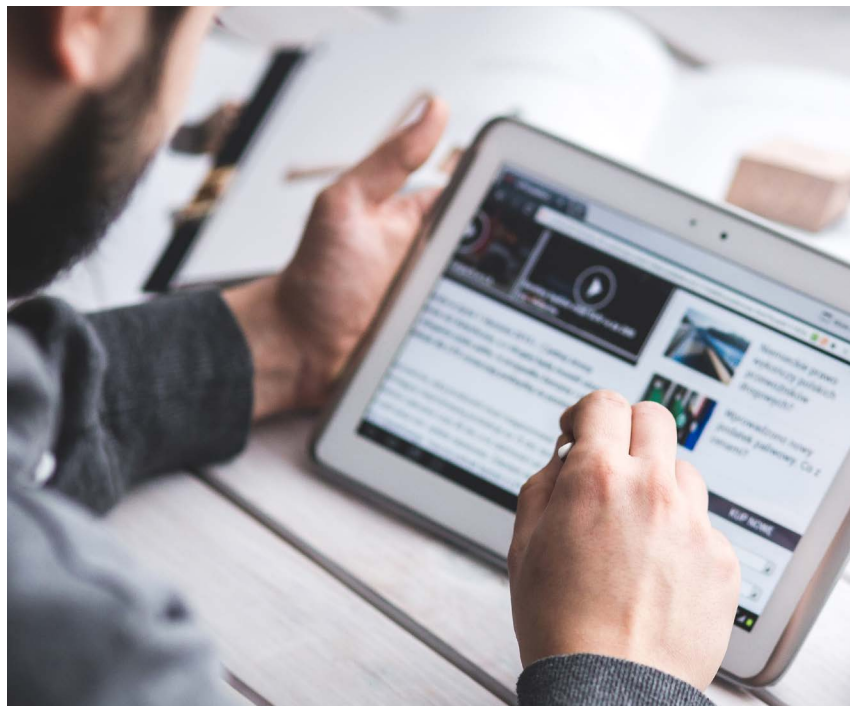
My Tenancy

My Tenancy gives you free access to services at a time that suits you without having to leave the comfort of your own home. You don't even need to pick up the phone. All you need is access to the internet and to complete a simple registration process.

My Tenancy offers many services including:

- Pay your rent online with Allpay
- View your rent statement and payment history
- View breakdown of your rent charges
- View your repair order history
- Report a repair online
- View the personal information we have about you
- View the details we have of your household occupancy

To have access to this service 24 hours a day, you'll need to be registered - so make sure you visit www.coophomes.coop and sign up today. On the front page you'll see the tab Tenant Services. Click on that and hover down to My Tenancy which will give you the link that sends us the request. You can also phone us on **0203 166 2608** or email homes@coophomes.coop.



Seasonal news

Holiday opening hours

Our offices will be closed from Monday 26th December, re-opening on Tuesday 3rd January. No routine repairs will be carried out over the closed period.

If you need an emergency repair during this time and Co-op Homes normally organises your repairs, please

call the usual number, **020 3166 2608**. Your call will be transferred to Pinnacle, our out-of-hours emergency contractor. If an operative attends they may only make a situation safe until a routine repair can be arranged after 3 January.

Residents of Bramleys and Longlife co-ops should check www.coophomes.coop for details of the emergency repairs service. Chippenham, Ealing and Nimbus residents should notify a member of their committees.

Remember that a gas leak is an emergency in all cases and you should telephone the National Grid on 0800 111 999 without fail.

You can report a routine repair online or email the repairs team on chsrepairs@coophomes.coop. We will deal with your request when our offices re-open on Tuesday 3rd January.

Friday 23rd Dec	Open (9am - 2:30pm)
Monday 26th Dec	Closed
Tuesday 27th Dec	Closed
Wednesday 28th Dec	Closed
Thursday 29th Dec	Closed
Friday 30th Dec	Closed
Monday 2nd Jan	Closed
Tuesday 3rd Jan	Open

Electrical upgrades

We told you in the last online edition of WOTS about our major works plans for 2016-2017 at Co-op Homes' properties.

We will soon be contacting residents at some additional properties not previously identified to let them know about our plans to carry out upgrades to electrical fuse boards to bring them into line with current regulations. This will ensure your homes remain safe. The work should not be disruptive and if your address is chosen you will be contacted personally over the next few months by the contractor selected to carry out these works, **Inteck Solutions**. If you have any questions about this project, please contact Gary Russell, our Technical Services Surveyor gary@coophomes.coop.

Being a good neighbour

For some people Christmas is a time for lots of visitors. Sometimes, this might mean additional noise and disturbance for a while. We are asking people to be tolerant of other people's lifestyles and understand that a jolly time for one might feel like a nightmare to a neighbour who is alone and wants peace and quiet. So, if you plan to have a party it would be considerate to let your neighbours know in advance, or even invite them along! And if you are affected by the noise of neighbours enjoying themselves, please exercise a degree of tolerance to different lifestyles and cultures and understand that in the areas in which we live we cannot expect to lead a life of complete peace and quiet.

Don't lose your home for Christmas

Paying your rent is not always the first thing you think about when making your plans for Christmas, but it shouldn't be forgotten. Sadly, over the last few months several residents have lost their homes due to rent arrears. This is something we are keen to prevent happening. So, please plan your Christmas spending carefully to make sure that your rent is paid on time and you avoid falling into arrears. You can pay online at any time by following the 'pay your rent' links at www.coophomes.coop or through your own online banking service. Your landlord bank account details can be found at www.coophomes.coop.



Be prepared!

At the time of writing we're not sure what the weather will bring over the winter months. However, we would like to repeat the guidance given by our Customer Focus Group about "being prepared". Sometimes, recurring inclement weather or power outages can affect our day to day activities and it is wise to plan ahead to help prevent emergencies. So, keeping an emergency kit at home in a safe place that contains essential items in the event of severe circumstances could prove very handy. Items to consider having close to hand should be stored in a sealable, water-tight container (zip-up bag is ideal) and checked from time to time to make sure your information and phone numbers are up to date and torches and radios are working. Also, remember to make sure that all household members know what your escape route to a safe place is in the event of an emergency.

- ✓ Wind up or battery-operated torch and radio and spare batteries
- ✓ Small battery-operated night lights
- ✓ Personal emergency telephone numbers written on paper: GP, local chemist, local taxi, family and friends, Co-op Homes or your landlord's repairs team.
- ✓ Phone number of electricity / gas / water / telephone / broadband companies
- ✓ Home insurance policy number and contact details
- ✓ Passport numbers, NI number, car registration and insurance details
- ✓ Telephone number of electricity, gas and water companies
- ✓ Basic first aid kit
- ✓ Tinned food you can eat cold (and can opener if not ring-pulled)
- ✓ Basic tool kit
- ✓ Small amount of cash
- ✓ List of prescription medication

It's also wise to check that you are aware of the main service intakes to your property so in an emergency you can isolate them if instructed to do so: it's best to be prepared now and ask yourself and adult family members if you know:

- How to find and turn off your water stop cock
- Where your main fuse board is
- Where the main gas supply enters your property

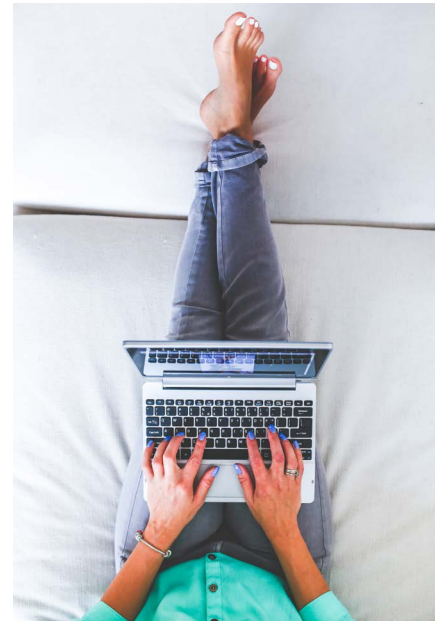
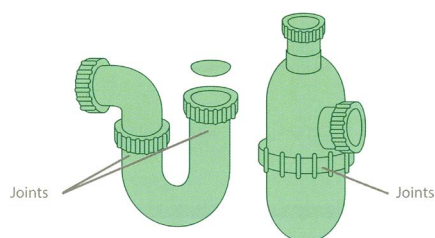
Does your utility company know if you have special needs?

Many utility companies have set up their own charities to offer support, grants and debt advice for those in fuel poverty, as well as set up special alerts for those who are vulnerable, disabled or have a priority need. To register, or find out more about what services are available for you or your household, check your utility company's website or the back of your bill.

Don't fall foul of drains

If we are called to a repair that is not the landlord's responsibility we will recharge you directly. This applies to blockages to WCs, sinks and drains caused by sanitary products, baby wipes, nappies, solidified cooking fat, hair or other substances. To avoid being recharged please routinely clear your wastes and clean once a month using hot water and soda crystals. Remember:

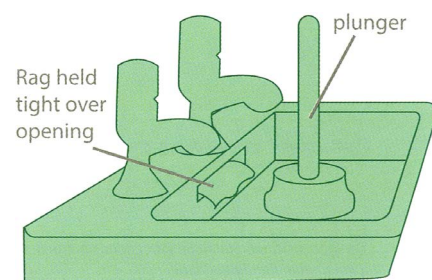
- Do not pour fat or other cooking oils down the sink or WC
- Do not flush sanitary products, baby nappies or cleaning wipes down the WC



Do you have home insurance?

Your co-op or Co-op Homes is not responsible for replacing the contents of your home (furniture, belongings or other personal items) or the loss of door keys in the event of fire, theft, flood, criminal damage, burst pipes and other household risks. Co-op Homes recommends that all tenants consider using the My Home insurance scheme as it offers residents the chance to insure home contents in an easy and affordable way. My Home is provided by the National Housing Federation through Thistle and is available for all tenants and residents living in social housing. My Home insurance will cover most of your household goods and contents whilst in your home. The insurance also covers replacement of external locks if your keys are lost or stolen and damage to external glazing, as well as the contents of your freezer.

To find out more: call **0345 450 7288**, email: myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk, or visit www.thistlemyhome.co.uk.



Repairs, news and feedback

How long should you wait for a repair?

Whilst we understand that many residents would like their repair completed as soon as possible, there are set time limits that apply for certain categories of repairs which are in line with the government's 'Right to Repair' guidelines:

You can report a repair to us:

- Online at www.coophomes.coop
- By email to chsrepairs@coophomes.coop
- By telephone to 0203 166 2608

EMERGENCIES	URGENT	ROUTINE	PROGRAMMED
24 hours	7 days	30 days	30 – 90 days
Emergency repairs make safe a fault where there is imminent threat to life, danger of a serious injury or major damage to the property. The problem will be made safe within 24 hours although repairs to resolve the problem completely may take longer	Repairs classified as urgent are those which prevent or resolve a significant interruption to facilities. Urgent repairs are carried out within seven days.	These are non-urgent repairs which are carried out within 30 days.	Sometimes, non-urgent work will need to take longer to be completed because of the extent or complexity of the work. Customers will be advised of the anticipated completion date for the project.



When reporting a repair, it will help us deal with it more efficiently if you could be clear about:

- What the problem is
- Where the problem is
- Whether any other work has been done recently
- Information about you or your home that will help us choose the best way to deal with it (i.e. what floor you are on, or if you have any special needs)

We will then:

- Confirm whether the repair is ours or your responsibility
- If we have agreed to carry out the repair, confirm the next steps
- Confirm that we have the correct contact details for you that we can pass on to the contractor
- Contact you afterwards to confirm that you are happy with the work.

It is important to note that if there is no-one at home to allow access to the operative at the pre-arranged appointment time, or if the operative is refused entry, the cost of the call out will be recharged back to you.

Where this happens more than once, Co-op Homes has the right to apply an additional £50 administrative fee to cost of the abortive call out.

Customer feedback results

To help us gauge satisfaction of services provided to Co-op Homes' residents, we employ external consultants to ask a series of questions and collect feedback from 50 of our 300 tenants, twice a year. We'd like to thank all of you who responded. The answers give us a marker to judge how well we're doing and where we need to do things a bit better.

Overall satisfaction whilst still very good was reduced in September with a combined figure of 82% against 88% for the previous period.

Looking at the comments you give us also helps us to identify what is not going right. Sophia Howells, Head of Operations, understands that sometimes things do go wrong and is making changes to service delivery to make sure we communicate what we can and cannot do better. For example, many residents call for a repair to be carried out, say for a blocked sink, or to have their light bulbs changed or hedges trimmed in theirs or their neighbours' gardens. These types of issues are not the landlord's responsibility and it has always been the tenant's responsibility to make their own arrangements to do this. We advise people who can't do this themselves to ask a family member or a kindly neighbour to help them as if Co-op Homes were to attend we must recharge for our services. Please remember that Co-op Homes, or your landlord, is only responsible for repairs that are essential for the upkeep of the property, not renewable items.

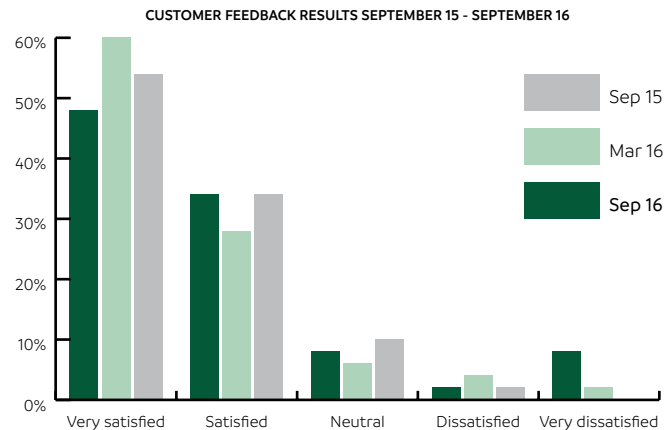
Complaints about rent and service charge increases for Co-op Homes' residents

The Government's Housing and Planning Bill enforced some changes for us all in the social housing world. One of the implications is the 1% rent reduction for the next four years for residents of housing associations. For the time being, co-ops and their members have been given a safety net as the government has stalled on the rent cut until 2020. Many housing associations like Co-op Homes are working on plans to reduce costs, increase other income sources or re-prioritise major works programmes as a buffer to the annual 1% rent reduction which has already started.

Applicable services are those that we must provide under the terms of your tenancy or are required to by law. The cost of some of these services is reflected in the service charge you pay to us and are not included in the rent. This may include maintaining common grounds, clearing dumped rubbish, performing electrical testing and fire risk assessments in common areas or ensuring we have sufficient funds to maintain and replace equipment that everyone receives the benefit of. Answers to typical questions can be found below:

My rent has gone down but my service charge has gone up

In some cases your overall weekly charge may have gone up even though your rent has decreased. This is because we have considered the services we provide in your communal areas and need to alter the service charge to recover these costs.



I don't want services from you – I only want to pay my rent

The service charge is not discretionary. It represents the costs of providing services which Co-op Homes must deliver to you under the terms of its tenancy agreement with you.

Will my Housing Benefit cover the service charge?

Co-op Homes has confirmed with the relevant local authorities that the service cost elements we have identified are eligible for Housing Benefit. If you currently receive Housing Benefit for all or some of your rent, this will continue to be calculated on the gross rent.

You must inform your Housing Benefit department of your new rent and service charges when the time comes.

If you live in an area where Universal Credit is being rolled out by the Government and you need advice, please contact your Community Housing Advisor via **0203 166 2608** or **homes@coophomes.coop**.



How are we doing?



What do you think of us?

We're committed to working with our residents and our co-op customers to ensure that everyone's views are taken into account. We want you to be confident that your views are really important to us as we aim to ensure that what we deliver is truly meeting your needs. There are lots of opportunities for us to collect your feedback and we do this by:

- Acting on feedback received from surveys and telephone calls
- Asking for your feedback on our publications
- Contacting you after repairs or major work carried out in your home to check that you are satisfied with the standard of the work and the conduct of the contractor
- Responding to your complaints and learning from them
- Sharing your compliments so employees know when they're getting it right!
- Inviting you to accompany community housing advisors on estate walkabouts
- Encouraging participation at customer focus groups where members monitor our work and make performance and service improvements
- Taking your views into account when selecting contractors
- Employing consultants to talk to you and check your properties so we can plan what works we need to do
- Developing our website and making it more interactive, for two-way communication.

We will share our progress on the changes we make as a result of your feedback in future editions of Word on the Street and more regularly with our Customer Focus Group who carry out a scrutiny role on behalf of all our customers at Co-op Homes. So, if there is something we could do better or that we're not doing at all – please tell us! Call **0203 166 2608**; email homes@coophomes.coop or log a complaint at www.coophomes.coop and we'll do what we can to put things right.

If you are interested in joining our Customer Focus Group but aren't sure what's involved or maybe feel a little intimidated by it, one of the group would be happy to talk to you and explain what's involved and what they get out of it. To take the first step, please contact nikki@coophomes.coop.

Accessibility

At Co-op Homes we are committed to equal access to all of our information. If you would like Word on the Street supplied in an alternative format, such as audio, Braille, large print or in another language, please email: homes@coophomes.coop contact us on **020 3166 2608** or write to us at the address below:

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