

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2020



Introduction from Karen

Welcome to PCHA's summer newsletter!

It's impossible to start this edition of the newsletter without bringing up Covid-19. However, rest assured that this summer newsletter is not all focused on the pandemic! We have plenty of other news, information and tips to bring you.

Without doubt, Covid-19 has changed the way we live and work overnight.

After four months of lockdown we are all getting used to this strange new world. Whilst lockdown is easing, the reality is that Covid-19 is still with us and will be until a vaccine is found, so life will not simply return to how it was before the pandemic. We will need to do things differently and not all of this is bad! As well as adapting to restrictions that may be in place, this situation has given us the opportunity to look the services we provide and come up with a new way of working – not only to keep both you and the team safe, but also to improve the services we provide to residents. This may include, for example, different working hours so that we can speak with or meet with residents outside of the normal 9 to 5.

This 'new normal' is very much a work in progress and we would like your suggestions to help us decide what it will look like. If you would like to help shape the new PCHA, please get in touch with me on karen@pcha.co.uk

Best wishes,

Karen

Chief Executive



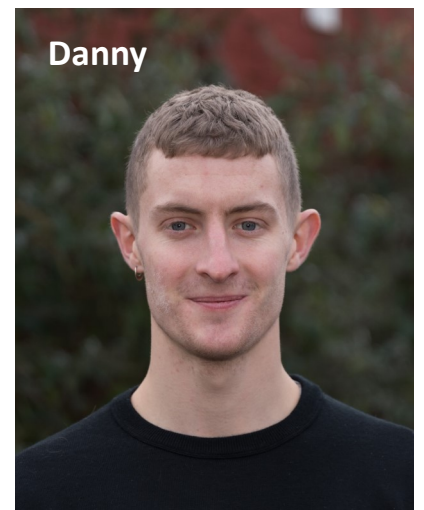
Our Tenancy Services Officers

Introducing Jean and Danny, our Tenancy Services Officers!

We are pleased to welcome **Jean Mahoney** as our new Tenancy Services Officer. Jean joins us with over 13 years' experience in the social housing and welfare sectors. She has a particular fondness for smaller community organisations where she believes staff can really get involved and provide a personalised approach to customer care.



Jean shares the role with **Danny Yates**. Danny joined PCHA in 2019 as our Housing Graduate but was promoted to Tenancy Services Officer in February 2020.



What does a Tenancy Services Officer do?

Our Tenancy Services Officers are involved with all aspects of housing management. This includes rent collection and managing arrears, assisting residents with any tenancy matters, managing new tenancies and dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Contact Jean or Danny

To contact Jean or Danny, email housing@PCHA.co.uk. If you prefer to speak to them directly, their contact numbers and availability are as follows:

	Availability	Phone number
Jean	Wednesday to Friday 9am to 5pm	07784 358 943
Danny	Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm	07784 358 941

New Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman – the service set up to handle complaints about housing organisations in the UK – has published a new Complaint

Housing Ombudsman Service

Handling Code. This code provides a framework to help social landlords respond to complaints effectively and fairly, and with greater consistency across the sector.

The key elements of the Code are:

- Universal definition of a complaint (i.e. what is a complaint?)
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- The structure of the complaints procedure – only two stages necessary and clear timeframes set out for responses
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement.
- Demonstrating learning in Annual Reports.

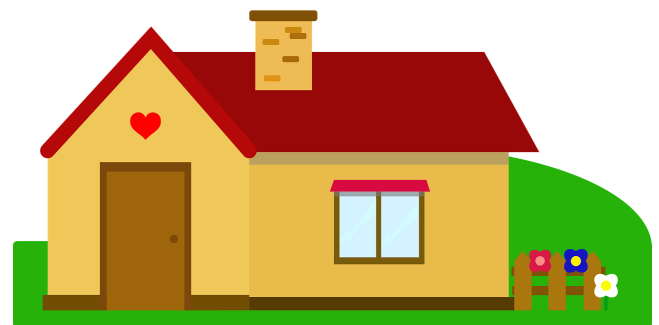
We will be reviewing our complaints policy to ensure it complies with the new code. Once we have done this we will publish both on the website. If you are interested in helping us review our policy please get in touch with Steve on steve@pcha.co.uk or Karen on karen@pcha.co.uk.

We will be asked to self-assess against the Code by 31 December 2020 and will publish the results in the residents newsletter in early 2021.

Right to Buy

If you were around back in the 1980's, you may remember that the Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher famously introduced a policy which allowed local authority residents to purchase their home from the council. This right is still in law today and each year allows thousands of council tenants to purchase their home from their landlord at a substantially discounted rate. However, at the moment, only council tenants are eligible.

In 2016/17 we told you that the Government announced the extension of the Right to Buy for housing association tenants, called the Voluntary Right to Buy



scheme. However, whilst there have been a number of pilots, the national Voluntary Right to Buy scheme has not yet been launched and there are no signs of this happening in the foreseeable future. The current Government remains committed to home ownership options but there has been little progress on any plans to extend RTB to PCHA residents. We will update residents through the newsletter if this changes/progresses.

There is also an additional mechanism through which you could possibly purchase your home at a discount, this is known as **Right to Acquire**. This scheme may be open to you if you have been a tenant for five or more years, have a good tenancy history and your property also meets the eligibility criteria. This depends on when PCHA acquired your home and how this was funded. It is important to note that the levels of discount are small in comparison to the RTB; in Bromley this is £16,000.

If you would like to find out more about home ownership through these schemes you can read about Right to Buy and Right to Acquire on the Government website, WWW.GOV.UK. Alternatively e-mail the PCHA housing team at housing@PCHA.co.uk.

Tenancy Fraud / Subletting

As a small community housing association we have to make the best use of the homes we own and ensure that the people living there are legally entitled to be there. People who are in need of social housing and on the waiting list have to wait even longer if homes continue to be occupied by people who don't have the right to live there.

Following information received by some of our residents, we recently identified a case of tenancy fraud and following an investigation we took back possession of the property in Thicket Road, Penge. We had suspected that the tenant had been living elsewhere while subletting his flat and he even had the nerve to advertise the property on AirBNB! We have now let the property to someone who really needs it.

If you're a PCHA resident and illegally subletting your home, this is a breach of your tenancy agreement, as well as being against the law.

What is tenancy fraud?

There are different types of tenancy fraud, including:

- **Unlawful subletting** – where a resident rents out their home without the knowledge or permission of the landlord
- **Wrongly claimed succession** – where the resident dies and someone tries to take over or succeed a tenancy that they are not entitled to
- **Key selling** – where a resident is paid to pass on their keys in return for a one-off payment
- **Unlawful assignment** – where a resident stops using their tenancy as their main or principal home, allowing another person to live there without permission from One Housing
- **Obtaining housing by deception** – where a person gets a home by giving false information on their housing application.

Tenancy Fraud / Subletting

What is PCHA doing to tackle tenancy fraud?

We carry out regular tenancy audits as part of our letting and housing management to make sure that the right people are living in our properties. We work with other social landlords and statutory agencies to detect fraud where the law requires it or where information sharing protocols are in place.

How do I report tenancy fraud?

If you think someone in your area may be subletting their home or living elsewhere, please report this to us in confidence. Email housing@PCHA.co.uk or call us on 020 8659 3055 or our temporary 'lockdown' numbers 07519 119918 or 07808 608 578.

Any information you give us will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will be protected. You can report the suspected fraud anonymously but please give us as much information as possible to help our investigations. The more information that we have the better the chance we have of stopping it.



Mental Health

PCHA recognises the importance of mental health and the impact poor mental health can have on a person, and those around them. This year, the impact of Covid-19 has undoubtedly been an additional strain on many people's mental health and may have a long-lasting impact. Therefore it is especially important that we are all able to recognise this and talk about it.



Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. In England, 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (such as anxiety or depression) in any given week.

Mental health problems can be particularly common in men. In 2018, there were 6,507 suicides registered in the UK. Three-quarters of these were men, and this has been a similar pattern since the mid-1990s. The fact that approximately 90 men per week commit suicide in the UK every week is a shocking statistic.

Whilst there may be many reasons why men are more likely to take their own life, the expectations of society around masculinity are likely a significant factor. Whilst our awareness and understanding of mental health has increased, there are still many environments and many professions where men may not feel comfortable expressing their feelings or asking for help.

I know this from personal experience. My dad, Ron Cooper, was born in 1932. He joined the RAF and shortly after returning home from serving in Iran his marriage broke down. He suffered a complete mental breakdown – his first but by no means his last! In those days, there was very little help available. In the following years he joined the prison service and married my mum but he continued to suffer from clinical depression throughout his life, often feeling suicidal and suffering from psychotic episodes. In a macho job, he felt he couldn't tell anyone at work how he felt and when he was depressed he pretended that he had flu. Throughout my childhood I thought flu lasted for months at a time! As the years went on my dad was offered pills but no other treatment, so his mental health deteriorated and remained a taboo subject. As a result of this when I left university I started working for MIND.

Mental Health

It was doing this job that made me realise that there is help available and that talking about our mental health is absolutely vital.

Mental Health and Housing

Housing and mental health are often linked. Poor mental health can make it harder to cope with housing problems; while being homeless or having problems in the home can trigger or worsen mental health issues. At PCHA we know that our responsibility and commitment is much wider than bricks and mortar. Where residents are struggling, we want to ensure that we offer support first, and tenancy enforcement second.

Our Mental Health Strategy

Our Mental Health Strategy aims to express our commitment to working with, and supporting, both staff and residents who may be experiencing mental health issues.

For residents we will:

- Train staff to identify mental health issues and have the confidence to deal with them
- Encourage residents to talk about any difficulties they face so that we can better support/signpost them
- Signpost residents to appropriate support agencies wherever possible
- Provide regular wellbeing events/activities for residents
- Raise awareness of mental health issues and support services locally in our newsletter and on the PCHA website
- Carry out a risk assessment before embarking on any legal action and ensure residents are signposted to advice agencies once legal action has commenced.

For resources to help with mental health and a list of helplines that are available, visit www.mind.org.uk. If you are struggling to pay your rent due to a mental health issue, contact our Resident Support Officer, Samantha Mason-Evans at samantha@pcha.co.uk.

Karen

Gardening in Lockdown

Whilst lockdown has been a difficult time for many people, being forced to spend more time in our homes has meant for some that they've finally had the chance to make home improvements. As we've been talking to you on the phones over the last few months we have heard how many of our residents have cleared out their clutter or given their walls a lick of paint. However, one story has stood out in particular that we would like to share with you.

At **74 Thicket Road** our wonderful residents Trish, Tracey and John have used the extra time they have had at home during the lockdown to completely transform their shared garden.

Trish told us that the residents began their journey by buying a few gardening tools to get started, including, some gardening gloves, a fork, a shovel, a pair of hedge clippers, loppers, a pair of secateurs, an edger, chicken wire, netting, a garden hose, grow bags and planters, seeds and lots of compost!

To date they have planted potatoes, micro salad leaves, beetroot, spring onions, lettuce, rocket, peppers, broad beans, broccoli and radish along with rosemary, thyme, coriander, parsley, mint and dill.



Garden at 74
Thicket Road
showing work done
on the left hand
side

Gardening in Lockdown

They have also purchased some new plants for the garden, including some herbaceous perennials and pollinators for the birds and bees, and plants to add summer colour to the garden including some lovely sunflowers. They have also purchased a communal bench where they can all sit and chat when social distancing becomes a thing of the past!

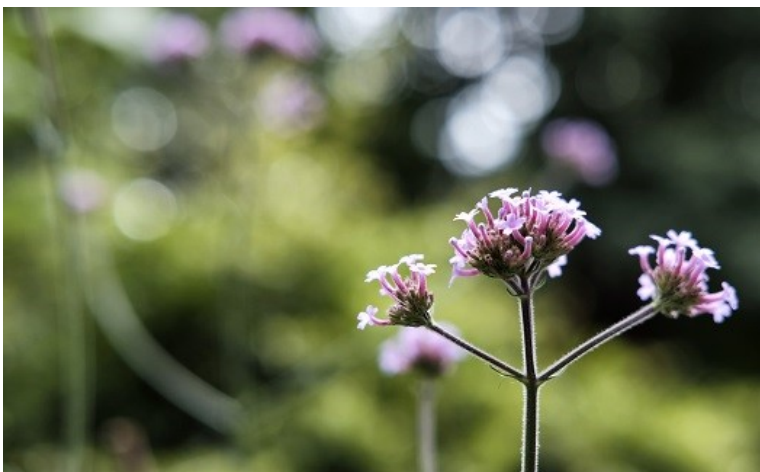


The garden now gives the residents sanctuary from the outside world. Growing and eating their own herbs and vegetables and watching the birds, butterflies and bees enjoy the garden too has been extremely satisfying.

We hope that this story inspires you to pick up a garden fork and test out your green fingers or maybe just have a go at growing a tomato plant on your window sill!

Do you have a story about a project you started during lockdown? We would love to hear it! Please let us know via email at housing@pcha.co.uk or on our Facebook page @PengeChurchesHA.

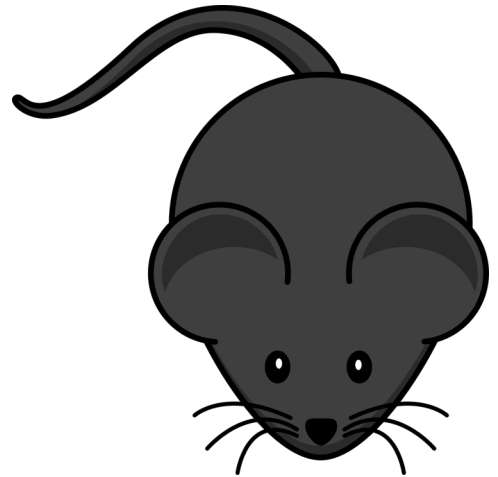
A special thanks to Trish for the amazing photos!



Rats!

The effects of Coronavirus on the local rat population

Mention the word 'rat' to most people and you will be greeted by cries of disgust and a face like someone who is eating a raw lemon... yuck! Yes, undoubtedly rats are one of the most hated pests. Unfortunately, across the country, the coronavirus lockdown has led to an increase in reports of rat sightings. The British Pest Control Association has seen a 51% rise in rat call-outs since March and we too have experienced an increase in reports of rats around homes and gardens during the coronavirus lockdown.



One of the reasons for this is that throughout urban areas, populations of rats rely on ready sources of food from the many businesses handling food or where food is eaten and discarded. Food waste is generated not just in restaurants, cafes and fast-food outlets, but also in offices and other businesses where employees take their own food into the buildings. With the widespread lockdown and closures of businesses, many of these regular sources of food have disappeared. Facing hunger, urban rats have changed their behaviour; they are coming out more during the day as well as at night, and are less wary of people or new surroundings. As a result, don't be surprised if you see more evidence of rats in streets or gardens.

If you see a rat while you're out and about, don't worry. In parks and gardens, they pose very little risk to humans and domestic pets.

PCHA will not use traps or poisons to deal with rat sightings in communal gardens. However, there are things that you can do to minimise the risk of rats and other vermin coming into your garden and entering your home.

Rats!

What can you do?

- Don't put leftover food out for the birds. If you wish to feed birds, use a purpose-built bird feeder and seeds or nuts specifically sold for birds.
- Keep your bin areas clean and tidy.
- Ensure the correct bins are used for recycling and household waste.
- Do not leave bin bags or rubbish outside your door to take to the bin area at a later time. This is particularly important in communal blocks where bin bags and other rubbish can also be a fire hazard.

Who is responsible for pest control?

In most cases, it's your responsibility as the resident to deal with a pest control problem in your own home or garden – including rats or mice. It's also up to you to let us know of any situation that might cause pests to enter your home such as holes or damage to an air brick or gaps around pipework. If it's obvious that the pest problem has been caused due to our neglect or disrepair, such as mice entering through a hole in the wall, we'll deal with the problem. We'll also deal with pests in any communal areas owned by PCHA, such as shared hallways. If an infestation in your home is due to something you have or haven't done (such as left bags of food outside or not put your bins out for collection), we may recharge you the cost of getting rid of the pests.

If you need help, contact London Borough of Bromley's environmental health team on **0300 303 8657**. They'll be able to give you more information and advice about pest control services and the charges in your area. The following link will provide the same information on Bromley's website: <https://rb.gy/bmvgh>.

Alternatively, the British Pest Control Association can help you find a reputable contractor. Contact them on **01332 294 288** or visit <https://bpca.org.uk/>.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse: Does it Only Happen to Women?

The Covid-19 pandemic lockdown has undoubtedly affected the whole nation. However, for some, an 'enforced' home stay has turned what should be a place of safety into a personal prison.

Research has shown that there has been a significant increase in domestic abuse and violence during the Covid crisis, with many support services reporting an increase in calls of up to 60% from the same period in 2019. At PCHA we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and over the past 12 months have provided advice, mainly aimed at women, through our website and newsletters. However, whilst abusive behaviour towards women is widely reported upon in the media, little is publicised on male victims or those from the LGBT communities.

The ManKind Initiative is a charity supporting male victims of domestic abuse. They reported that in 2018/19, 576,000 men and 1.2 million women were victims of partner abuse. This is to a ratio of two female victims to every one male victim – a startling statistic.



Domestic abuse isn't just about acts of violence. As victims of domestic abuse, men have reported many different types of abusive acts. These include:

- Threats of violence for noncompliance in their behaviour
- Being told they will be reported as the perpetrator, ensuring denied access to their children
- Being humiliated in front of friends in regard to their masculinity.
- Emotional abuse and 'gas lighting' (causing someone to doubt their own thoughts and beliefs)
- Sleep deprivation or attacking them whilst asleep
- Destroying their personal property
- Withholding their medication
- Sexual abuse
- Giving them the 'silent treatment'
- Tracking their every movement and accusing them of having an affair.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is also prevalent in the LGBT community. Broken Rainbow UK, an LGBT charity providing support and awareness around domestic violence, reports that 1 in 4 lesbian, gay or bisexual people experience domestic violence within their relationships, and up to 80% of transgender people suffer domestic abuse. There may be additional barriers that prevent people in the LGBT communities reporting the abuse, including:



- The lack of awareness both in and outside the LGBT communities
- Homophobic behaviours
- Coming out to friends and family, and perhaps not getting the support they were seeking
- Feeling isolated and trapped as a result of not coming out and therefore living with the abuse for fear of exposure.

At PCHA we believe that everyone, whatever their gender, should be supported if they find themselves a victim of domestic abuse. There are a great number of charities and helplines set up to support all victims of sexual abuse. Here are some of them:

Men: call **Mankind's** call confidential helpline on **01823 334244** or visit www.mankind.org.uk.

LGBT: call the **Broken Rainbow** confidential helpline on **0300 999 5428** or freephone number **0800 999 5428**; or visit the website at www.brokenrainbow.org.uk.

Women: Call **Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline** for confidential advice, 24 hours a day on **0808 2000 247**, or visit www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk.

In all cases, if you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.

Alternatively, if you would like to explore your support options and are not yet ready to call a specific support service, please contact our Domestic Violence Support Champion Samantha Mason-Evans at PCHA. You can email her on samantha@pcha.co.uk.

A Reminder: Barbecues...



Enjoying a barbecue with family or friends can be a great way to enjoy a summer evening!

Barbecues *are* permitted in your communal garden as well as in your own garden. However, it is important they are positioned in a location that will not cause a nuisance to neighbours or cause damage to tree or fences. It is also important that you speak to your neighbours before you use a barbecue in case they need to make arrangements, for example, bring in any washing they may be drying outside or ensure their children are safe.

We strongly advise that if you are using barbecues, you:

- Make sure your barbecue is well away from sheds, fences, trees, shrubs or garden waste.
- NEVER left unattended when being used and that they are properly extinguished when finished.
- Keep a bucket of water, sand or a garden hose nearby for emergencies.
- Use enough charcoal to cover the base of the barbecue, but not more (normally around 5cms or 2 inches).
- Keep children, pets and garden games away from the cooking area.
- After cooking, make sure the barbecue is cool before moving it.
- Follow the safety instructions provided with disposable barbecues. Never use a barbecue indoors.
- Empty ashes onto bare garden soil, not into dustbins or wheelie bins. If they're hot, they can melt the plastic and cause a fire.
- Enjoy yourself, but don't drink too much alcohol if you are in charge of the barbecue.
- Never use petrol or paraffin to start or revive your barbecue; use only recognised lighters or starter fuels on cold coals.

... and Satellite Dishes!

During the recent lockdown period when we all found ourselves confined to our homes, analysis has shown that television viewing increased drastically. Watching live broadcasts such as news programmes increased by 17% and in the first three weeks of lockdown, the BBC saw viewer numbers increase by 23%. Not surprisingly, subscriptions to Sky, Netflix, NowTV, Virgin and BT, to name just a few, went through the roof!



As a result, at PCHA we have had a number of enquiries about putting up satellite dishes and aerials on PCHA homes and blocks.

Most of the subscription-based TV providers are internet or cable based and do not require a satellite dish. However, Sky TV *does* require a dish. Therefore, before you decide to sign-up to a Sky contract, please be aware that:

- **If you live in a block of flats, we do not allow individual aerials or satellite dishes.** You will need to choose an alternative service that doesn't require a dish.
- **If you live in a house, you must seek permission from us to put up the dish.** Whilst we wouldn't normally refuse permission, it is a requirement within your tenancy agreement that permission is sought. You must also enquire with the Bromley planning team to ensure that planning permission is not required.

If you would like to put up an aerial or a satellite dish, please contact us at housing@pcha.co.uk to ask for permission and for more information.

Mental Health in Lockdown

Managing Mental Health in Lockdown; It's OK to be not OK!

by Sam Mason-Evans, PCHA's Resident Support Officer

As with everyone, Covid-19 has presented me with challenges. You don't have to have had Covid to be affected by the sadness enfolding the nation, or weighed down by the feeling life will never be the same again. Our British 'stiff upper lip' mentality can see us so busy smiling and pushing through, we forget to take a minute (or 15) to have a meltdown, and say 'It's not ok, and I am not ok'!

Ticking along unaffected by unfolding disruption is not normal. Our friends, loved ones, employment and social spaces are changing. Many for the good, and some as yet unknown, however, as creatures of habit, Covid-19 could not be planned for by the average Joe.

We have found ourselves in a world where wearing face masks is the expected norm, and we live in an isolated bubble of an altered reality. Meetings occur by Zoom (or similar medium), and with home working, the smaller interactions (a talk by the kettle, a laugh in the lunchroom), are replaced by conversation with ourselves.

I don't miss the daily commute; I *do* miss those small interactions with my team. With their quirks, characters, humour, and capabilities, I would come into the office and see beaming faces, hear funny stories, and be swept along on a tide of camaraderie and shared commitment. When I first joined the team I would feel uncomfortable when there was a lot of talking, knowing I had limited time to get my work done, however, our Chief Exec would arrive on scene and say 'It's very quiet down here' if there had been silence for too long.

Working within the realm of support, conversations can be a negotiation of some length to help the individual achieve their desired outcome. After that

Mental Health in Lockdown

concludes, there is need for 'down time', and recharging so I can be fresh for the next person. A trip to the printer, a hop to the kettle, or a shared moment with a colleague is for me the 'reset' needed so I am fresh for the next person. Covid-19 has removed that and taken away my pattern of norms. As I have found out what my 'normal' has become in my new 'home office' surroundings, there have understandably been bumps in the road.

These days I tend to get covered in fur, as my overzealous and loving cats feel the need to shower me with love, to compensate for the colleague no longer sat across from me. Occasionally sitting in my executive chair to make up a 'kitty' board meeting inhouse, things look differently now. If I fail to acknowledge the change, or realise I have been in some way impacted, ignoring, rather than acknowledging the hurt of missing human connection, and my team; in the end, what is left, is what I became last week, essentially 'a hot mess'!

There is no shame in having a moment, no shame in shedding a tear, because we are human beings not human doings, and we are built for connection, for relationship with others. The only shame comes when we allow ourselves to think we can indefinitely live independent of others, not needing to connect with another soul. We feel like a complete failure when we realise, we cannot, and the shame we feel, or bring upon ourselves, is a burden we are not deigned to carry.

Be kind with your words because they leave a lasting impression. What you may say in a moment can scar someone for years. A throw away line, may be the difference between building or breaking someone's day. Words carry power and the old line 'sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me' is a lie that has kept people bound for years as they struggle to conform to the expectation and feel weak when they fail.

If you have been affected by similar moments, you are not alone. Feel the emotion, process the feelings, and recognise it may be a pathway to a brighter tomorrow. When we conquer our fears, we open the doorway to possibilities and they can bring so much joy!

Contact Us



General:

020 8659 3055

housing@pcha.co.uk

Repairs:

020 3434 6789

repairs@pcha.co.uk

To report a health and safety issue:

020 8659 3055

healthandsafety@pcha.co.uk



During the COVID lockdown and as we transition back to the office, please contact us via email where possible. If you do need to speak to someone, please use the following numbers:

General / housing enquiries: 07519 119918
(weekdays 9.30am to 2.30pm)

Repairs: 07808 608578

(weekdays 9am to 5pm)

www.pcha.co.uk

Making a positive impact

