

Newsletter

Winter 2018



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- Hearing your voice – how to get involved with PCHA
- Join us for mulled wine and mince pies!
- Our team – who does what
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Introduction from Karen

Welcome to our Winter newsletter.

As we approach the end of 2018 it has been a year of unprecedented change both within PCHA and the world at large.

The impact of the Brexit negotiations is still unclear, with only four months to go! Deal or no deal, the impact Brexit will have on our economy, the construction and maintenance industries, travel and our finances remains uncertain.



In the autumn the government released its Green Paper on Social Housing following the tragedy at Grenfell. The government has promised that the proposed reforms of social housing will “re-balance” tenant–landlord relationships and pave the way for stronger communities. There are five key themes:

1. Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
2. Expanding supply and supporting home ownership
3. Effective resolution of complaints
4. Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
5. Ensuring homes are safe and decent.



The principles are great but there is still a great deal to do in terms of working up the detail, so watch this space. However, we are keen to start working on these themes so please get in touch if you would like to get involved.

Introduction from Karen

Universal Credit and other welfare reforms continue to cause some hardship amongst our tenants and increasing debt and poverty is a real concern. However, the challenge for PCHA is that our rent is our only income and as UC rolls out fully in Bromley we will have to take an increasingly robust approach to managing arrears.

Within PCHA we have taken repairs back in house in order to enable us to have a better control over our assets and to improve our customer service. So far, it has gone pretty smoothly. However we are still on a steep learning curve and constantly reviewing our procedures and processes so please bear with us.

In order to do this we have reviewed the staff structure and expanded the office space so if you haven't seen the new office please pop in and see us – we hope it has created a much more welcoming and useful space for our tenants.



Karen
Chief Executive



Hearing Your Voice – Get Involved!

Tenant engagement

Improving the ways we engage with our tenants is high on our agenda. We are looking at different ways to do this, including better use of the technology that is now available.

As part of this, we want to know *how* you would like to engage with us in a way that suits you. On our website homepage (www.pcha.co.uk) you'll find a link to our **Tenant Engagement Survey** with four short questions to answer – it will only take a couple of minutes of your time! We hope this will help us understand how to tailor our approach.

We are also planning a few events over the next few months, with details to be confirmed. Please get in touch if you are interested in any of the following:

Talk: Say No to Knives – February 2019 (date to be confirmed)

We invite you to come and listen to Sarah from the charity Say No to Knives talk about the impact of knife crime and how to avoid being a victim – or indeed how to discourage your children from making poor choices about knives.

Tenants' Workshops: January–March 2019

We're hoping to run a variety of tenants' workshops for FREE on topics that might be of interest. Topics are likely to include:

- ♦ Interview Skills
- ♦ CV Writing
- ♦ Stress Management



If you would like to register your interest in the workshops or suggest a topic, please get in touch with us (full contact details are on the back page).

Hearing Your Voice – Get Involved!

Our service

Customer Service is equally important to us and we want to ensure we get the basics right. We are reviewing our customer service standards and complaints policy, so please get in touch with Karen if you would like to be involved / give us your opinion.

We'd also like your feedback on our service so we can better tailor our service to meet your expectations. So, on our website (www.pcha.co.uk) you will also find a link to our **Tenant Satisfaction Survey**. We really do value your feedback, so please do let us know how we're doing – and more importantly, how we can improve.



PCHA's 50th Birthday

2019 is our 50th birthday. To mark the occasion – and in response to the government's Green Paper on tackling the stigma of social housing – we would like your help to produce a booklet that tells some positive stories about social housing (and hopefully PCHA) and the difference it can make. Please get in touch with Karen if you would like to share your story. Some of our staff will be sharing their experience of living in social housing too.



Our Team – Who Does What

Here's the lowdown on who we all are and how you can contact us.

Karen Cooper – Chief Executive

Contact Karen on our general office number – 020 8659 3055 – or by email at karen@pcha.co.uk.

Housing

Our Housing team looks after tenancies and tenancy-related queries, tenants' welfare, and manages rental payments and arrears. Contact the Housing team on 020 8659 3055 or email housing@pcha.co.uk.



Jennifer Duberry – Tenancy Services Manager

Danuta Evans – Customer Services Officer (Tenancy)

Repairs & Maintenance

The Repairs & Maintenance team looks after repairs and day-to-day upkeep of our properties. Contact the team on 020 3434 6789 or repairs@pcha.co.uk.



Mark Knight – Maintenance & Contracts Manager

Natalie Ions – Maintenance Officer

Mark Stenning – Maintenance Operative

Finance

The finance team looks after our accounts and makes sure our contractors are paid on time. You can contact Finance on finance@pcha.co.uk.

Darren Eade – Head of Finance & Corporate Services

Cassandra Barns – Finance & Admin Officer

Join Us for Mulled Wine & Mince Pies!

We'd love you to join us on **Monday 17th December** to celebrate the festive season. We'll have mulled wine, hot chocolate and mince pies on offer, and you can chat to our staff and have a look around our newly refurbished office.

Date and time: Monday 17th December, 2–4pm

Location: PCHA office, 99 Maple Road



Monday 17th is also our 'Crazy Christmas Jumper' day so be prepared to see some silly jumpers... and come wearing one if you'd like to join the fun!



Repairs Update

The long-awaited 'taking repairs back in-house' date has been and gone and I'm pleased to report that it's been a success to date. Naturally, we are receiving more calls and getting the chance to talk to you all more, which has had a positive impact in the office and I am hoping with our tenants too. So far, tenant satisfaction levels have been good – long may that continue!



The Repairs & Maintenance team consists of myself – Mark Knight, Maintenance and Contracts Manager; Natalie Ions, Maintenance Officer; and Mark Stenning, Maintenance Operative. Between us we manage all the repairs and maintenance that come through to PCHA. We are starting to get around our properties more and I am sure you will have bumped into Mark Stenning by now as he has a large involvement with communal areas.

I will continue to provide updates on the repairs service in our quarterly newsletters, so please look out for these as they're a good opportunity to provide you with useful information and reminders. Here are a few below.

Fire alarms

It is important for your safety that we carry out fire bell tests in all communal areas that have a fire panel. The weekly tests will be typically carried out by our Maintenance Operative, Mark Stenning. Mark has a duty to ensure all call points are tested in the buildings, which means that sometimes he will have to go to the furthest point and it may take longer than usual to stop the bell from ringing. Your patience is appreciated!



In the event that the fire alarm goes off due to a fault rather than a fire please call our contractor BHT—the contact details are on the fire panel.

Repairs Update

Rubbish in communal areas

We need to ensure that we all take care of how we dispose of our rubbish, especially at Christmas when we tend to generate even more rubbish than usual. We would ask you to ensure that all rubbish is placed in the bins provided. We have noticed an increase in rubbish being dumped in the communal areas. As well as looking unsightly, this can pose a health and safety risk. It falls to us (PCHA) to have it cleared up and to do this, we raise an order for a contractor to attend. The cost of this removal is put on your service cost, so *you* pay for it!! If you live in a block and you know who is dumping rubbish, you need to report it so we can stop them and hopefully keep your service costs down.



Repairs over Christmas

This year, due to having repairs back in-house, we will not be closing for the whole Christmas period as normal. The in-house repairs team will be available to answer your repairs calls in between the bank holidays (see the back page for our Christmas opening hours). BAS – our out-of-hours specialists – will continue to be available for emergencies throughout the period.

From all of us in the Repairs & Maintenance team, we hope you have a great Christmas and we look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Mark Knight

Maintenance and Contracts Manager



Dealing with Condensation

At this time of year we often have an increase in calls about damp and mould. They are often caused by condensation where water vapour in the air from daily activities such as showering, cooking and drying clothes hits a cooler surface and turns back into liquid. Simple things can help reduce condensation in your home, preventing damp and mould from occurring.

Reduce moisture:

- ⇒ If possible, hang washing outside rather than inside to dry. If it has to be hung inside hang it in the bathroom, close the door and open a window slightly or put the extractor fan on.
- ⇒ Don't put washing on radiators.
- ⇒ Keep kitchen door closed and open a window or use extractor when cooking
- ⇒ Cook with pan lids on and don't overfill the saucepan.
- ⇒ Keep the bathroom door closed and open a window when running a bath, and after a bath or shower.
- ⇒ Use extractor fans if you have them.



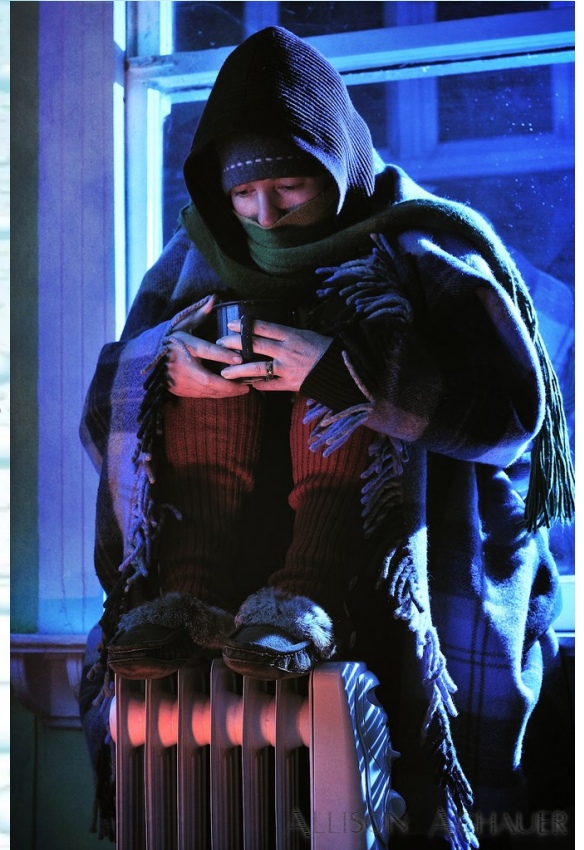
Increase ventilation

Some ventilation is needed to let the air circulate but take care not to over-ventilate in cold weather. Ventilating for at least 30 minutes a day will replace moist air with dry air from outside. Opening a small window at one end of the property or downstairs and a small one at the other end or upstairs will do this. Leaving a space between furniture and walls will also allow air to circulate.

Dealing with Condensation

Keep it warm

- ⇒ Cold walls and surfaces encourage condensation to form, so keeping the home warm will help to control it. Try to keep some heating on all day in cold weather.
- ⇒ Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. If you don't have heating in every room, keep doors of unheated rooms open to allow some warm air in.



Treating mould

Where condensation problems have been neglected and mould has begun to form:

- ⇒ Treat any mould already there by wiping down and spraying walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash.
- ⇒ Don't try to remove mould with a brush or vacuum cleaner, as this will make spores airborne and spread them further.



Respecting Our Staff



We want to have a mature and respectful relationship with our tenants and so we aim to treat you professionally and respectfully at all times.

We understand that at times we get it wrong and that you may feel frustrated with us about something, but this is no excuse for verbal or written abuse of any kind being directed towards our staff.

If you are unhappy about something, please talk to us in a calm and respectful way and we will try our best to help you and restore your faith in us. We will always try and find a positive resolution. We will not respond to personally offensive comments and/or abusive language, whether verbally or in writing. Occasionally we may need to terminate a telephone call. This will always be a last resort and if we do so, we will call you back the next working day to try to resolve your problem.

Abuse or harassment of staff is a breach of tenancy and in extreme circumstances we may take legal action to end your tenancy.



Gas Safety Checks

Annual gas safety checks are carried out for your safety. Faulty gas appliances and gas pipework, poor gas fittings and blocked chimneys/flues can be life-threatening to tenants. This is why landlords like PCHA are required by law to complete an annual gas safety check.



As a responsible landlord, PCHA takes this health and safety obligation very seriously. We work in partnership with our gas contractor Clairglow to ensure that all our properties have their gas safety check carried out before the previous one expires, on an annual basis. This means the check may happen 10 or 11 months after the last one, to ensure the deadline is never missed. There are serious consequences for PCHA if we do not meet our legal requirements, as well as potential risks for you if your appliances are not safe.

When Clairglow contacts you to make an appointment, please ensure that you provide access. If you are unable to do so, it is really important to cancel the appointment in advance and arrange another one.

Missed appointments are time-consuming and Clairglow charges us for this. For this reason, we are now recharging all our tenants the cost of each missed appointment – the charge at present is £25. So if you have confirmed an appointment time and access is not provided as arranged, we will be sending you an invoice for payment.

Providing access to complete the annual gas safety check is a condition of your tenancy agreement, and an obligation that you must comply with.

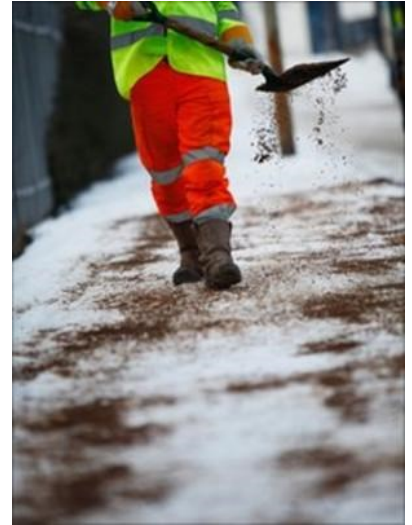
For the first time this year one of our tenants refused to give access for the gas safety check to be completed. PCHA had to go to court and get an injunction – permission from the court to force entry into the property. The cost of this legal action was £898.40, which is now the tenant's responsibility to pay – in addition to the cost of the lock change and damage repair. PLEASE DON'T LET THIS BE YOU!

Winter is here...

After a glorious summer, winter has finally arrived! We'd like to take this opportunity to clarify our position about gritting.

At some of our larger schemes we do provide grit/salt bins for use by tenants, but unfortunately we cannot offer a gritting service. This is because:

- As a small housing association, we simply cannot guarantee that our staff (in this case our part-time handyman, Mark) could reach our schemes in severe weather due to issues with the roads and public transport. In extreme weather much of the country comes to a standstill and our staff are often stranded themselves. Therefore, we would not want to commit to providing a service we cannot guarantee to deliver.
- We do not have the specialist equipment to cope with gritting in extreme weather.
- Our services are 9am–5pm Monday to Friday, meaning we can't guarantee to be able to carry out gritting when it would be most effective. Potentially, gritting too far in advance could make pathways and roads more hazardous. Effectively, the best time to grit is overnight when we're not working.
- Clearing snow can actually make paths icier and consequently more hazardous.
- Each scheme is individual and many are off quiet local roads which may not be treated by the local authority. Consequently, even if we could grit/clear our paths, you may still not be able to get out easily.



Let it snow...

Whilst we completely understand your concerns, we cannot promise to provide a service that we cannot deliver. Indeed, the MET office will often give out weather warnings advising people to stay at home at such times!

Therefore, in the event of snow and icy conditions over the winter, we advise the following:

- Stock up with non-perishable food in advance of any anticipated bad weather.
- Ensure that you have enough electricity/gas (etc.) on your meters.
- Cancel any unnecessary journeys.
- Speak to neighbours about clubbing together if you need to order shopping etc.
- Ensure that you have snow boots or wellies if you do need to go out.
- **STAY INDOORS** where possible!



If you are vulnerable and alone and you are stuck at home and struggling, please ring us and we will help if at all possible!



However, if you are fit and healthy, ignore the travel chaos and get out and have fun making snowmen and snow angels!



Contact Us



General:

020 8659 3055

housing@pcha.co.uk

Repairs:

020 3434 6789

repairs@pcha.co.uk



Christmas Opening Times

Please note our Christmas opening times are as follows:

Monday 24th–Wednesday 26th December: CLOSED

Thursday 27th December: 10am–4pm

Friday 28th December: 10am–4pm

Monday 31st December: CLOSED

Tuesday 1st January: CLOSED

We reopen as usual at 9am on Wednesday 2nd January 2019.

If you have any emergency repairs that cannot wait until the office re-opens,

please call:

BAS on **020 8854 8700**

or

Clairglow (for gas repairs) on **0800 0748055**

