




Your tenant and leaseholder newsletter



**Blooming
through the
lockdown
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Welcome



Councillor Louise Mitchell
Cabinet Member for Housing
and Homelessness Prevention

The Covid-19 crisis has been an enormously difficult time for all of us.

I know many of you are struggling with young families, trying to combine roles of teacher and child minder while continuing to work and provide for your family.

Those of you living by themselves have had to withstand long months of isolation, unable to meet up and see your friends or family members.

So many residents are worried about money, about the future of your job or about the health of yourself and your family.

I want to thank all of you who have been doing the right thing by staying safe and staying home.

Hopefully we, as a country, are moving past the worst of the crisis, but we still need everyone to be vigilant.

If you develop symptoms get a test immediately, self isolate and register with the NHS Test and Trace service (see page 3).

As a Council we have tried to do what we can to support all our residents and I am very proud of all our housing staff.

Many are still on the frontline, on our estates and in our independent living schemes, providing the essential services and support for our residents that cannot be delivered any other way.

Others have been working from home, and have adapted to new ways to advise, support and deal with the issues that affect our residents.

If you have worries about paying your rent, please don't ignore it; reach out and talk to us. We can offer advice and point you in the direction of possible help.

If you have issues with anti-social behaviour or noise contact our housing management team and we will try to resolve the issue.

If you are concerned about a fellow resident, please let your housing officer know.

Covid-19 has created enormous challenges for us all but, by working together as a community, we have shown we can and we will get through this.

Thank you

Blooming marvellous

Thank you to Organiclea for bringing a welcome burst of summer to our independent living schemes.

Working with the housing engagement team, Organiclea, a workers co-operative growing food in Chingford, supplied organic seeds, potted plants and garden tools to independent living residents to brighten up their flats and the communal spaces of their scheme. Our contractors, Aston Group, volunteered to help carry out the deliveries.

Kristine, resident at The Chantry, Chingford, said: "We are very grateful and everything is starting to grow!"

Seeds and plants were also delivered to some of our estates.



Test and Trace and you

The NHS Test and Trace service has been introduced so we can return to normal life as quickly as possible, in a way that protects us all.

The service will trace the spread of the virus, isolate new infections and play a vital role in giving an early warning if the virus is increasing, locally or nationally.

Test and Trace means that anyone who develops symptoms of coronavirus can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus.

if you develop symptoms, you must continue to follow the rules to self-isolate with other members of your household and order a test to find out if you have coronavirus.

if you test positive for coronavirus, you must share information promptly about your recent contacts through the NHS Test and Trace service to help us alert other people who may need to self-isolate.

By playing your part, you will directly help to contain the virus by reducing its spread.

For more information go to:

www.walthamforest.gov.uk/testandtrace

WhatsApp on your estate



Our housing engagement team is helping residents stay in contact with their neighbours using WhatsApp group chats. Residents use the groups to support each other through the

lockdown, receive service updates from us and feedback on services. To start or join a WhatsApp group for your estate, message us on **077 1553 6865** or **07961 323864**.

Changes to Housing Allocation

In December last year we asked for your views on proposed changes to our housing allocation scheme, which sets out how we allocate social and rented housing. Thank you to all who responded.

Our proposals were adopted by Cabinet in April, and we are now progressing the work that needs to be carried out

to implement the new scheme later this year. If you are a housing applicant or a transfer applicant, you will be contacted directly over the next few months with information about how the changes might affect you, and what you need to do. We will also be updating information on the Council website before the new scheme is introduced.

Send us your Lockdown Videos

We've all had a lot more time on our hands during the lockdown and we want to know how you've kept yourself busy.

Send us your lockdown videos to share your stories to: engagement@walthamforest.gov.uk or WhatsApp it to **07715536865** for a chance to win £50 of shopping vouchers.

We'll also be featuring the winners on our social media channels!



Is your recycling going to waste?

Did you know that if something non-recyclable ends up in the green recycling bin, it can mean an entire truckload is rejected when it gets to the recycling facility.

That means materials which should be recycled end up being disposed of like normal rubbish, which has a negative effect on the local and global environment.

It can also mean your recycling bin may not be emptied on collection day. If our collection crews notice something in the recycling bin that shouldn't be there, they will not collect it until it has been removed.

Items that should not be in the green recycling bin include food, textiles, nappies, garden waste and electrical items.

Thank you to all residents for their patience regarding their bin collections throughout the changes we've made to collections days and during the Covid-19 crisis.

Leaseholder News

If you are a leaseholder you may have received a notice to tell you that we have incurred costs within the last 18 months relating to works which you will be required to contribute to under the terms of your lease.

These letters are not a demand for payment.

We simply want to keep you informed about the issue while we work out your share of costs. We will write to you again with a detailed breakdown of the specific works and costs and which will show how your charge has been calculated.

If you're a Council leaseholder struggling to pay service charge/major works charges, contact our Home Ownership service for advice and assistance.

Email: rtb.lease@walthamforest.gov.uk

Housing Heroes

Thank you

to members of Priory Court Community Centre, Walthamstow, garden club for donating fresh organic produce to the PL84U AL-SUFFA Food Bank.



Thank you

to Marina who has been making masks for her family and her neighbours.



Thank you

to Mike for keeping local Resident Association members connected and delivering food to isolated neighbours.



Thank you

to Elaine for picking up good food that supermarkets would otherwise dispose off at the end of the day and delivering it to residents who are ill or self-isolating.



Your rent and you

Make sure you continue to pay your rent during this crisis.

If you have lost all or part of your income or are concerned about keeping up rent payments, contact our rent team to talk about the issue as soon as possible.



Brij, housing rents manager, collections

With many residents experiencing changes in their circumstances, we have seen a big increase in people claiming Universal Credit (UC).

Brij's team can help point residents in the right direction for support.

Brij said: "We are working from home but still providing a front line service. We can still provide all the services our residents need."

If residents need statements and proof for benefit applications the team has set up a remote printing system to ensure service continuity and that letters and information are sent out as normal.

They are also being proactive, if they see a resident might be struggling to keep up to date with their rent.

Brij said: "Instead of residents calling us, we are picking up the phone and providing them with assistance."

"At the end of the day our work is to help people to live safely and comfortably in their homes."

Have you signed up to our online rent portal? It's simple to join and easy to use.

You can check the balance of your rent account anytime; make a payment online simply and safely; check if benefits have been paid into your account and make sure your contact details are up to date and correct.

Simply click the 'my account' button at the top of the home page of walthamforest.gov.uk



Universal Credit (UC) means you receive a monthly payment of your benefits including 'housing costs'. You then pay that portion to the Council immediately. You should check that this amount covers the amount you need to pay. To claim UC you need to have a bank account.



Ade, housing rent manager, maximisation

Ade's team works with residents who have built up large arrears on their account.

They reach out to tenants by phone and email and make sure they are accessing the available support.

Ade said: "We need to make sure residents know about and access

the benefits they are entitled to and keep on top of their rent."

There is concern that when the crisis passes some residents will have built up arrears and be unable to clear them and save their tenancy.

"It's important we do what we can to help keep tenants out of arrears. We are doing everything to ensure their tenancy is not in jeopardy in six months' time."

Are you worried about your rent? Don't delay. Contact the rent team now. Email rents@walthamforest.gov.uk

Meet our team

The Covid-19 crisis has forced us to rethink the way we work and serve our residents. Right across our housing services, our teams and officers have had to adapt to working in new ways.



Junad - senior housing officer

Working from home, Junad uses video conference facilities if residents have access to them, as well as the phone and email.

The lockdown has seen a rise in complaints about anti-social behaviour, and in particular reports of noise nuisance which we continue to deal with.

“Many of the residents have been really understanding and patient,” said Junad. “We get people reporting noise and they say ‘please can you deal with this informally,’ rather than make formal complaint.

“Even people causing ASB are being equally cooperative. I just spoke to a family about the noise their children were making and they were so apologetic, they didn’t realise how it was affecting their neighbours.

“Residents are being very supportive to each other. The whole community is coming together.”

For housing management issues,
contact your housing officer or email:
wfdirect@walthamforest.gov.uk



Julie - local area coordinator (LAC), part of the Independent Living Service

Local area coordinators, like Julie, work alongside individuals who may be isolated to help them stay strong and build on their personal strengths and resilience.

The government lockdown means Julie has only been able to contact residents over the phone, via WhatsApp video calls, or while delivering food parcels or during welfare checks.

Julie said: “A lot of our people were isolated before Covid, and their anxiety levels have now heightened.

“When you have conversations with people who are suffering with anxiety, we don’t talk about Covid, we have other more cheerier conversations. They don’t want to talk about doom and gloom.

“Quite a few of the residents show real resilience, they say ‘I lived through the war, this will pass’. Most people are really lovely, they always ask ‘how are you, are you doing okay?’”

What you can do to help

Please follow Government guidance on gatherings outside and maintaining social distancing. If you are using communal spaces and gardens on estates, be mindful of your neighbours.



Dennis – caretaker

Dennis is part of a team of caretakers who take care of several estates and sheltered housing schemes.

Dennis said: “We deal with spillages and broken glass and a lot of our time is spent keeping communal areas clean, sanitising door handles, key pads, bannisters, anywhere that is going to be touched by a lot of people.

“The majority of our residents are appreciative that we are out there every day and trying to do our job.

“It is difficult because it means we have a lot less chance to talk with residents but I’m glad to be going out to work every day and getting to help people.”



Sam – team leader, independent living schemes

Sam is on the frontline of coordinating and delivering services for residents at our independent living schemes in the north of the borough.

Sam coordinates staff to carry out daily checks on residents and helping make sure some of our most vulnerable residents are safe, secure and have what they need during lockdown.

Sam said: “The independent living service has enhanced its offer during these difficult times and makes daily contact with all residents who would find this beneficial. Alternative offers of contact are available after consultation with residents.”

For those clients who require a physical visit provisions have been made to provide this. A big part of Sam’s work is liaising with social workers, carers, doctors, hospitals and with local chemists to support residents and provide essential services.

Sam said: “The job requires attention to detail, ensuring we prioritise our older residents and their well-being during this trying time. While this is hard work the benefits to residents is worth it.

“Many are adapting to this crisis in different ways. Some of them are dealing with it quite well and being resilient. Others are finding the lack of contact with friends and family a challenge.

“A lot of the residents are self-reliant and are really pulling together and when they go out shopping, they’ll get fresh fruit, vegetables, bread and milk for a neighbour and leave it outside their door.”

What you are saying to our staff

“Thank you very much for your efforts! I do appreciate that you and all your colleagues must be working under very difficult decisions as well as coping with the worries the rest of us face about the dangers of our families catching this horrible virus. I hope you get through it fit and well, and your family too of course.”

“I just appreciate the call, just to hear a voice that is not from the tv or radio.”

“I would like to take this opportunity to say how helpful you have been on the numerous times we have exchanged emails and spoken directly on the phone. I wish everyone had your attitude, the world would be a nicer place!”

“Let me just thank you again for your help with the matter. I know you must be extremely busy. You have been very patient and helpful and I hope you are being treated well. Wishing you and your family good health.”

“Thank you for getting into contact with the neighbours and helping. I have spoken with him and he was actually very nice and apologised. He did not realise that his music was so loud. We have now exchanged numbers and he advised me if he is ever noisy to call or text him. He is a very reasonable man and we have sorted it out”

Repairs and maintenance

The Covid-19 crisis meant that we had to change the delivery of our repairs and maintenance services to your homes, in line with the Government's guidelines.

Our key priority was ensuring the continued delivery of emergency repairs and the maintenance services necessary to keep you safe in your home.

As some parts of the lockdown are relaxed, our contractors are returning to other duties.

So what is happening now?

We are starting to work through the legacy of repairs to communal areas where we don't need to enter residents' homes.

We have also restarted some of our planned works. For the moment we are limiting that work to external and communal areas only.

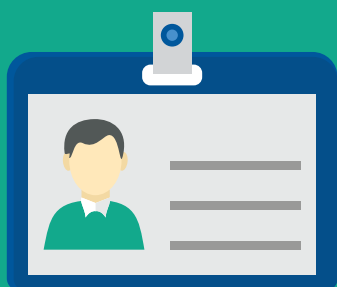
What are you doing about ensuring staff and resident safety?

The Council, working closely with our contractors, has ensured we meet government guidelines by developing a set of secure standards.



- Staff maintain small work teams to limit social interaction.
- Staff use physical barriers to ensure social distancing and safe working zones.
- Staff provided with extensive PPE and follow protocols on what PPE to wear in external areas, communal areas, travelling in shared vehicles and in site offices.
- No hand to hand exchange of tools or working face to face.
- Protocols on safe travelling to work.

THESE STRICT PROTOCOLS EXTEND TO ANY INTERACTION WITH RESIDENTS.



All Council staff and our contractors carry Photo ID. Do not let anyone in your home without seeing their ID.



What about carrying out work in people's homes?

If we do need to access a resident's home, we will in the first instance contact them directly and carry out a detailed risk assessment before any staff enter their home.

Our contractors are still here to deal with emergency repairs.

For emergency repairs contact us as normal on 020 8496 4197.

What about non-emergency repairs? When will they resume?

Our contractors will be carrying out some communal repairs.

At the moment, we are not returning to carrying out non-emergency repairs in people's homes.

We will monitor the government's guidelines and plan to extend the range of our return to work plans in line with them.



Please help Ian do his job

Ian has worked in the borough for the past 18 years and is part of the team from Aston Group carrying out annual gas safety checks in people's homes.

These gas safety checks must continue despite the Covid-19 crisis.

Ian said: "A lot of residents are in an unenviable situation. They really want us to check their boilers are safe but they are obviously frightened about having anyone come into their home at this time."

Ian and his fellow engineers always carry PPE equipment and have been trained in safety protocols.

"We are taking extra precautions, wearing PPE like gloves and masks and following safety procedures. We always explain what we are doing and most people appreciate that we have no choice but to do this work."

An unsafe gas appliance, if left unchecked, could lead to fires, explosions and poisoning.



Progress on ensuring emergency access

Work has started on new parking restrictions to make sure emergency vehicles can always get access to our estates. These works are essential to keep you safe.

The Council is ready to start street lining and signing those estates consulted under road traffic regulations about the emergency access works.

Those affected will receive a letter the week before works are due to start. Temporary orders will allow us to move cars if they are left during the works.

Once these estates have been lined and signed we will be able to issue penalty charge notices, that carry a fine, as well as move or remove cars blocking the access routes.

Below is a list of the first estates to have the work done, starting this month.



- Essex Close
- Fred Wigg & John Walsh Montague Road
- The Drive & Vine Street
- Reynolds Court & Neville Close
- Canons Court
- Clifton Court
- Downland Court
- Plaxton Court
- Rayner & Burrell
- St David's Court
- St George's Court
- Clockhouse
- Weir Court
- Lime Court
- Holmcroft Court
- Goddarts House
- 34 St Mary's Road
- St Patricks Court
- Aldriche Way
- Priory Court
- Arkley Road and Crescent,
- Longfield Court
- Beechwood Drive
- Turners Court
- Avenue Estate
- Hatherley House
- Moresby Court
- Ridgeway Estate (Bowyers, Knight, Grant Courts & the Chantry)
- Linnett Close & Holland House
- Winsbeach

In the summer, we plan to start consulting residents about our draft parking policy and whether you want a permit parking scheme on your estate.

Learn new skills, train for a new career and get help with that job interview

Morgan Sindall Property Services and Aston Group, the two main contractors for Waltham Forest Council housing, have launched an exciting range of free online training courses and workshops for our residents.

Pre-employment training workshops

A range of virtual pre-employment training sessions aimed at helping Waltham Forest residents towards meaningful employment.

What you need to know

Training sessions are delivered using Skype or MS Teams, or via telephone, either 1-2-1 or in groups. Training is free with no qualifications or experience needed. Courses cover CV writing, mock interviews & job interview skills and job searching.

Rachel, human resources officer at Aston Group, said: "We also give people one to one advice sessions, help them refine their skills and learn about what employers are looking for. It's about building confidence. People have skills they do not know they have."



Feedback from the first online workshop

"I was really grateful for the workshop because I was able to prepare and use it for a job interview."

"Thank you so much for delivering a great workshop with Helen. I appreciate all the help I got and look forward to the next one."

"I enjoyed it because I was able to change my CV and cover letter and be prepared for my interview and use what I learned."

Online training courses

South Essex College Courses – What you need to know

Online courses open to all Waltham Forest residents, so long as they are 19 and over and they have been resident in the UK for at least three years. Courses are free and online and accredited at Level 2, so you get a certificate, a useful addition to your CV and possibly an inroad into a new career.

Courses include Improving personal exercise, health and nutrition, management techniques, data protection, Counselling skills and caring for children and young people, but there are plenty of others to choose from.

Learning Curve courses - What you need to know

Courses are also free and accredited. They cover adult social care, nutrition and health, digital skills, retail knowledge, customer service for hospitality and a host of other areas.

For full details of all the courses and workshops available and how to access them go to www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/staying-home-activities-and-resources#learnnewskills

The Covid-19 crisis means we have had to change the way we engage with residents with our engagement team busy being in touch by phone, email, WhatsApp and online.



Strategic Tenants and Residents (STAR) Panel

We're pleased our regular STAR panel was still able to meet.



The panel was able to convene online (pictured, above).

Even those panel members who weren't keen on using digital services before the crisis made an extra special effort to be there virtually.

William Wood (pictured, left) is a stalwart of the STAR Panel and was shortlisted for the 'Tenant Lifetime Contribution' award in the National Housing Heroes Awards last year.

William said: "We had our first STAR meeting on Microsoft Teams. I'd never used an on-line App but I had a lot of support from the

housing engagement team."

William has also volunteered to be part of our new Task Force on Building Safety.

William said: "We had some training sessions via Zoom for the task force which went well, it was quite fun and easy to get online and we are planning our first online meeting."

Building Safety

Members of our new Task Force on Building Safety have so far taken part in two training webinars and their first meeting is being scheduled online.

The Task Force will provide input on how residents can be involved in working with the Council to improve building safety. Members include tenants and leaseholders from across our housing stock, from high rise blocks and estates to street homes.

Housing Forum

This bi-annual event is open to all our residents and is a popular and important gateway for us to communicate and meet with many of you.

Due to the current Government guidelines, we are planning to hold a digital Housing Forum.

You will be able to hear from Cllr Mitchell and some of our senior housing team updating you on our services and our plans ahead as we hopefully move through this Covid-19 crisis. We will notify residents about the forum when we have finalised our plans.

Resident Readers required

Our resident led scrutiny team recently examined how the Council is engaging and communicating with residents.

One of their key recommendations was the development of a 'Resident Readers' Panel. This e-panel will have a say in how the Council communicates with residents, including Resident News, as well as looking at ways to gather feedback on resident communications.

If you have an eye for written communications and would be interested in being involved contact:

engagement@walthamforest.gov.uk

Contact Us

Waltham Forest Council Housing, Resident Services

Cedar Wood House
2d Fulbourne Road
Walthamstow
E17 4GG

Waltham Forest Council Housing, Resident Services Billericay Office

16a Morris Avenue
Billericay
Essex
CM11 2JR

Please contact our housing teams via phone or email.

Sign up to get news about Waltham Forest housing by email at walthamforest.gov.uk/StayConnected

For general enquiries, reporting anti-social behaviour and repairs:

☎ 020 8496 4197

✉ wfdirect@walthamforest.gov.uk

📍 www.walthamforest.gov.uk/housing

Phone lines are open from 9am–5pm Monday to Friday.

For help and advice on paying your rent:

☎ 020 8496 4197

For feedback and comments on the newsletter:

Please email engagement@walthamforest.gov.uk