

# Happy New Year From WATMOS Community Homes!

The WATMOS Board, Executive, TMO committee members and Group employees wish you a very happy and healthy 2009.



**You will find lots of useful information in this edition including:**

## Achievements

Read about recent successes in tackling anti social behaviour and information about satisfaction information concerning the way we manage your rent account.

## Service Improvements

Read about our new and improved money advice services and a range of new on-line services provided through our website.

## News Updates

Read about how we are progressing with the new repairs and major works partnering contract and about the new agency that has replaced the Housing Corporation as our regulator.

## Local News

Read about what the local TMOs have been doing across the Group during the last 6 months.

## TMO Sponsors Police Bikes

Sandbank TMO has made a significant contribution to crime reduction initiatives in their area by sponsoring the local Police to help them purchase bicycles for the Bloxwich 'beat bobbies'.

This has achieved a higher visible Police presence on the estate and a quicker response when problems occur.



# A Guide to Future Rent Increases



**The Rent Guarantee for transferring tenants ended in March 2008. From now on your rent will increase so that it reaches the target rent for your property.**

The target rent is set by the Government for all social housing landlords across the country. This ensures that rents become fairer and less confusing to tenants. The target rent takes account of the size, location and condition of every home, along with the level of local property values and earnings.

If you were a tenant when your home was transferred from the Council in 2003 your rent is likely to be below the target level. Generally, our flats are quite close to the target rent but our houses have some way to go. Over the next few years your rent will move towards the target that has been set for your property.

From April 2009, a transferring tenant's rent will increase by inflation plus 0.5% (for 2009 this means 5.5%) plus £2.08 until it reaches the target rent for your home. Information about the target rent for your home is included in your rent increase letter.

If you became a new tenant of WATMOS after March 2003, the rent you pay should already be at the target level. Rent increases for tenants who are paying the target rent are pegged at inflation plus 0.5% (for 2009 this means 5.5%).

## Better Money Advice Services for You

**We keep hearing about the credit crunch and the effect it's having on everyone. People are finding it difficult to pay their bills and their rent and some people have lots of debts that they find impossible to manage.**

Up to the end of October this year, WATMOS had evicted 7 tenants due to unpaid rent arrears and this can always be avoided. The last thing your TMO or WATMOS wants is for you to lose your home and this will never happen so long as you make arrangements to pay.

Since September, WATMOS has been working in partnership with the Walsall Money Advice Project based in Walsall Town Centre. They are an independent body who are able to help you manage your rent arrears and any other debts you might have. If you are in rent arrears and we have threatened to take you to court we will ask you if you want us to refer you to the Money Advice Project. You can ask us to refer you at any time, even if you don't have rent arrears but have other debts that you are worried about. An experienced debt advisor will visit you at home (or at your local TMO offices or at their office if you prefer) and go through all your debts with you. They will help you to prioritise your debts, make offers of payments to companies you owe money to, check to see if you are

getting the right benefits, and attend court with you to present your case. Although the debt advisor will speak to us about any rent arrears you might have, anything else you tell them will be confidential. If you need on-going advice the debt advisor will continue to support you to manage your money to help you get back on track.

So if you would like to speak to someone about debt or money worries, please contact your TMO and ask them to refer you to the Money Advice Project. You cannot contact the Project directly to set up your first meeting, you have to be referred by us, but once the referral has been made the Money Advice Project will contact you themselves.



## Tenant Panel News

Following its successful participation in Bloxwich Carnival in the summer, the Tenant Panel has been working with WATMOS on the review of Community Empowerment and resident involvement services.

Panel members formed one of the focus discussion groups and helped to facilitate others with TMO committee members, young people and under-represented Groups.

Members of the Tenant Panel have recognised that most tenants and residents don't have the opportunity to see what other TMO estates are like and how they are run. As a result tours of the TMOs were arranged for Tenant Panel members on 21st November and 19th December. The Tenant Panel visited all of the eight TMO areas to look around and talk to staff and Committee Members. Darren Clayton, the Tenant Panel representative from Sandbank TMO said, "We wanted to do the tours to help Panel members get a better understanding of each other's TMOs so that we could offer better advice and opinions to each other and not always be talking about our own TMO. I think the tours definitely achieved this".

If you would like to get involved in the Tenant Panel please contact Sarah Lloyd or Sue Griffiths on 01922 471910. We particularly need tenants from Leamore and Twin Crescents as we have no-one on the Panel from these TMOs at the moment.



# The TSA – Have Your Say!

On 1 December 2008 a new agency called the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) replaced the Housing Corporation as the regulator of Housing Associations.

During the next 12 months the TSA will be organising a 'National Conversation' to engage with tenants across the country about what they want from their landlords. This will be used to create a new set of standards that will form the basis of future regulation and for inspections undertaken by the Audit Commission.

This is your opportunity to shape the approach and the priorities of the new regulator. We will let you have more information about this as soon as the details of local and regional consultation events are known.



## Independent living event

A guide to help and support

Walsall Town Hall  
Tuesday 17th March 2009

Find access to information and general advice on:

- Age Concern
- Walsall Shopmobility
- Home library service
- Help around the home
- Health, Safety and Well being

The event is open to all members of the public to look around the stalls and speak to staff from different organisations, who will be on hand to give advice.

Please feel free to attend anytime between 11.30am – 2.30pm.

For more information about the event please call Vicki Mann 01922 655415.



# Managing Your Rent Account: How Are We Doing?

At the end of the last financial year we sent a satisfaction survey to every tenant along with their rent statement. In total we received 293 (17%) completed survey forms.

The results were very positive and demonstrate a high level of satisfaction in almost all areas of the service:

- Just over 96% agreed they were happy with the way we managed their rent account.
- 94% said they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with how often they received their rent statement.
- 92.4% said it was either very easy or fairly easy to understand the rents statement.
- 92.5% said they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the help and advice given to them by their TMO when discussing their rent account.
- 86.4% said they felt they were informed quickly enough when they had fallen into rent arrears.
- 98.7% agreed that the letters we send out are easy to understand.

## Acting on Your Comments

We are using your feedback to improve services:

### You said

"I am not always sure when the 'rent-free weeks' are"

### We will

Publicise the dates of the 'rent-free weeks' in the Tenants Newsletter.

### You said

"Can I view my rent statement on-line?"

### We will

Introduce a new secure on-line rent statement service.

# New Repairs & Major Works Partnering Contract Coming Soon

We are on-course to start our new repairs and major works partnering contract on 1st April 2009. The contract will run for a period of four years, ending in March 2013.



Tenders were opened on 19th December 2008 and the following potential partners are being considered:

**Bromford Maintain**  
**Burrowes**  
**Home Comfort**  
**Ian Williams**  
**Lovells**  
**R.O.K**  
**J Tomkinsons**

A selection panel made up of tenants, Board members and Group employees will receive presentations from the shortlisted firms in January and the WATMOS Board will make a final decision about appointment by early February.

**This is an exciting new approach to repairs and major improvement services and we intend to deliver a range of service improvements as part of the project. These include:**

- Extending the normal day-time repairs service to 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm on Saturdays
- Introducing 2 hour appointment slots
- Improving the transmission and sharing of repairs information through better computer links
- Increasing the flexibility of operatives to carry out additional jobs associated with a repair to a value of £100 to ensure that works can be completed at one visit
- Improving security by providing all repair operatives with a common identity card
- Introducing a free-phone number for out of hours repairs
- Providing an option to introduce a local 'handyman' service where this doesn't currently exist

**We will announce the appointment of the repairs and major works partner in the next newsletter.**

# Sandbank TMO Shares its Expertise

**Over the last few months Sandbank TMO has hosted study visits from three developing TMOs who were keen to learn from this successful and long-standing TMO's experience and expertise.**

The groups that visited Sandbank were Mount Association from Haverford West, South Wales and Four Towers TMO and Jarvis Towers TMO from Birmingham.

In each case the groups received a tour of the estate and a short seminar presentation led by Sandbank TMO Chair, Bill Edwards, explaining how the TMO and WATMOS work. All three groups were hugely impressed with what had been achieved at Sandbank and were inspired to go back home and try to do the same on their own estates.



## Gas Servicing – Taking Action to Protect Your Health & Safety

**In a previous newsletter we told you that we had applied to evict a tenant who had not let us into their home to carry out essential gas servicing and safety checks. Unfortunately that tenant continued to deny us access and was evicted as a result.**

Since then we have been forced to issue court proceedings for the same reason against two other tenants who live in the Delves. Again this could ultimately lead to the tenants losing their homes if they refuse to let us in. At the court hearings in January we plan to ask the court for a possession order that is postponed to give the tenant a final opportunity to let us in to do the gas check and to tidy up their gardens. If they don't do what the court orders, they are in danger of being evicted.

WATMOS and the TMOs take gas safety very seriously and we will pursue every case through the courts where we cannot get in to meet our legal obligations.

## Success in Tackling Drunken and Rowdy Behaviour

**At the end of November the Central Team working in partnership with Burrowes Street TMO successfully obtained Anti Social Behaviour Injunctions against a tenant and two of her visitors for drunken and rowdy behaviour.**

The tenant didn't turn up at court for medical reasons and so the Court made an interim Injunction Order against her preventing her from causing nuisance at Burrowes Street. Her two visitors had Injunctions made against them for 12 months each, stopping them from entering Winn House and preventing them from causing a nuisance on the estate.

Another Burrowes Street tenant accused of anti social behaviour had his case adjourned to a date in January after giving an undertaking to the court not to cause nuisance in the meantime.

Such successes in court rely on the collection of a wide range of evidence of nuisance and anti social behaviour, ranging from incident reports from caretakers and housing staff, to witness statements from residents. Some residents are happy to give evidence in court, while others wish to remain anonymous. However, if witnesses provide information to a housing officer this can be used as hearsay evidence in court.

The Central Team and the TMOs are committed to working in partnership with you to tackle anti social behaviour so that our estates can continue to be safe and pleasant places to live.

# Restorative Justice Burrowes Street Style

Burrowes Street TMO has come up with a novel way of dealing with incidents of graffiti and vandalism on their estate. When some local children were caught writing on the walls of one of the blocks of flats, the TMO could have referred the matter to the Police.

Instead they negotiated an alternative approach with the parents that enable the children to make amends for what they had done. Under the supervision of their parents, for two hours a day over three Saturdays the children were put to work helping to clear leaves and generally tidy up the estate. This was the best solution for all concerned and is a good example of restorative justice in action.



**We are here to help people when they need us most**

**Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be made homeless? What if your house burned down, or if you lost your job and then your accommodation as a result?**

What if you had to flee your home because your partner was being violent to you or maybe you were being harassed by an irresponsible landlord?

These are some of the circumstances in which we work with the Council's Homelessness Service to re-house people who are in urgent need.

Local authorities have a range of duties to assist people facing severe housing difficulties. In Walsall, because the Council no longer has any housing of its own, it relies on housing associations in the area, like WATMOS to help it meet these duties. As a local community-based landlord, it is important for us to be there to help when people need us most.

## whg Tenants Home Contents Insurance

**A special services for whg and WATMOS Tenants only**



- Insurance premium for as low as £0.91 per week for £6,000 of Contents cover for the over 60's and from £1.36 per week for £9,000 of Contents cover for all others
- Premium payment options
- Cover tailored for tenants i.e. includes cover for Tenants Improvements and Tenants Liability
- Nil excess
- No additional security requirements
- Accidental damage to contents up to £1,500 for any one claim

**Please call 01922 426733/426718 for an application pack**

# The Delves TMOs Invest in their Environment

In 2007 WATMOS introduced an incentive system to reward TMOs for good performance. Delves East and West TMOs performed really well last year and received a total of just over £23,000 in incentive payments.

Following consultation with residents at the Annual General Meeting it was decided that this money would be used to fund four Environmental projects.

## Middleton Close Communal Garden

A large scale improvement was made at Middleton Close flats that involved removing old sheds and creating a new landscaped area. The gardens and drying area were enlarged and rear perimeter fencing was replaced to provide extra security.

## Fencing in West Bromwich Road

One metre high fencing and gates have been erected to the perimeter of the flats at West Bromwich Road. This has enhanced the external appearance of the flats which are the first TMO properties seen as people enter our management area.

## Brockhurst Place Garages

The forecourt area at the garages in Brockhurst Place has been renewed. This improvement compliments the roof and door refurbishment works carried out in 2005.

## Bell Drive Communal Garden.

Following consultation with the residents a new communal garden and additional parking spaces have been provided for the flats in Bell Drive. This has included removing an existing drying area, landscaping the grounds in front of the flats, providing new smaller drying spaces and enclosing the garden with ornamental walls and iron work.

Delves East and West TMOs hope to continue to use the financial benefits of good performance to make real improvements for their residents.



## Chuckery Fun Day Success

**On Saturday 30th August 2008, Chuckery TMO held a Fun Day to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the "Paddock Flats".**

All residents were given a celebration Gift Pack that included a special celebratory key ring, bookmark, Teddy Bear and fridge magnet.

A presentation was made to the longest-serving tenant Stan Hampson. He has been a resident of Croft House for almost the entire 40 year period.

The attractions on the day included a Shire Horse belonging to Mr & Mrs Turner of Croft House, A Gospel Choir from a local church, a Martial Arts Display, a 'beat the Goalie' game, a cake stall, Fancy Dress competitions for children and face painting by the Palfrey Sure Start team. In addition, a few foolhardy souls agreed to go in the stocks and have wet sponges thrown at them!

The event was extremely successful and raised £430 to be shared between the County Air Ambulance Service and the PDSA.



# WATMOS online

## New Services Available Through Our Website

We are pleased to announce that tenants can now receive a number of our services on line. In order to benefit from this, a simple registration process needs to be followed, and you will be able to access the following:

- Rent account statement and history
- Repair ordering and history
- Updating of contact details and special requirements
- Status of housing applications

Go to [www.watmos.org.uk](http://www.watmos.org.uk) and follow the link to register. You will need your tenancy reference number, which you can find on your rent statement or correspondence we have sent you. Alternatively contact your TMO for assistance.



In order to continually develop our online services, we value your feedback. Please email [info@watmos.org.uk](mailto:info@watmos.org.uk) and tell us what you think.

## Contact Details

You can find **WATMOS** at:  
29 Stafford Street  
Walsall  
WS2 8DG  
Tel: 01922 471910  
Fax: 01922 612967  
Or email us on  
[info@watmos.org.uk](mailto:info@watmos.org.uk)

You can contact each of the TMOs as follows:

**Avenues TMO**  
10/11 Second Avenue  
Brownhills  
WS8 6JA  
Tel: 01922 427652  
Fax: 01543 452905  
Email: [avenues@watmos.org.uk](mailto:avenues@watmos.org.uk)

**Burrowes Street TMO**  
Burrowes Street  
Walsall  
WS2 8NN  
Tel: 01922 613292  
Fax: 01922 746949  
Email:  
[burrowes@watmos.org.uk](mailto:burrowes@watmos.org.uk)

**Chuckery TMO**  
2 Brookes House  
Tantarra Street  
Chuckery  
Walsall  
WS1 2HS  
Tel: 01922 644456  
Fax: 01922 634565  
Email:  
[chuckery@watmos.org.uk](mailto:chuckery@watmos.org.uk)

**Delves East TMO & Delves West TMO**  
West Bromwich Road  
Delves  
Walsall  
WS5 4NW  
Tel: 01922 720790  
Fax: 01922 638658  
Email: [delves@watmos.org.uk](mailto:delves@watmos.org.uk)

**Leamore TMO**  
1 Dover House  
Providence Close  
Leamore  
Walsall  
WS3 2AW  
Tel: 01922 493266  
Fax: 01922 475181  
Email: [leamore@watmos.org.uk](mailto:leamore@watmos.org.uk)

**Sandbank TMO**  
1a Clarke House  
Bloxwich  
WS3 2HF  
Tel: 01922 400333  
Fax: 01922 400219  
Email:  
[sandbank@watmos.org.uk](mailto:sandbank@watmos.org.uk)

**Twin Crescents TMO**  
11 Grove Crescent  
Pelsall  
Walsall  
WS3 4NG  
Tel: 01922 682539  
Fax: 01922 864109  
Email:  
[twincrescents@watmos.org.uk](mailto:twincrescents@watmos.org.uk)

