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Celebrating International Women's Day

Women at our Ealing refuge and our outreach service spent a morning celebrating women's empowerment and diversity as part of their International Women's Day festivities.



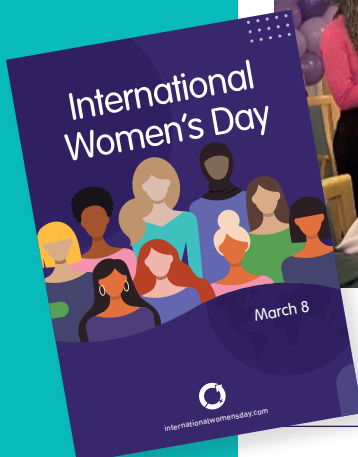
The day included fun events such as bingo, karaoke, and manicures together with an assortment of sweet and savoury snacks including a chocolate fountain!

Guest speakers from the NHS also attended and spoke about different support services that women could access.



“ There was lots of laughter and fun, and everyone left smiling. The speakers were also very informative. Our goal was to inspire and raise the confidence of the women living in our refuge and those who are part of our outreach services. Everyone on my team did a great job organising and delivering the day which was a great success!”

Kizzy Anderson, Service Manager of DVA Ealing



Our Corporate Plan 2022-27

Housing for Women began in the 1940s as an employment agency supporting single women who found themselves unemployable. Women were initially supported with training, clothing and sometimes meals and respite. However, it soon became clear that these women needed something more... **a home.**



Zaiba Qureshi
Chief Executive

“ The need to provide women with good homes and services remains today and perhaps even more so given the harsh economic environment and cost of living crisis.

Whilst we have made good progress in some areas over the life of our previous plan, our customer service has fallen short, and this has been endorsed in the number of complaints we receive and our most recent satisfaction results (see page 4).

Our Corporate Plan 2022-27 clearly sets out a required step change, bringing our customers back to the core of our operations. Over the first 3 years we will be focussed on a “Back to Basics” approach in rebuilding how we communicate with and engage our customers. This activity will be delivered through our Customer First Strategy which sets out the route map to improve our customer service (see page 5). Our new People Strategy will also be key to supporting this cultural shift as well as developing our teams’ skills to deliver positive outcomes for our customers.

Our new housing and finance system is beginning to streamline case management and customer contact, enabling our teams to record and track customer queries and requests effectively and our new Customer Service Team provide a single point of contact. This should in turn free our teams to do more customer facing work (see page 6).

We know we need to do more to win back the trust of our customers and show you that we are listening and acting on your feedback. We hope in time to have increased levels of engagement, with residents working with us to co-produce improvement plans and holding us to account in respect of our activities and performance.

We will be celebrating our 90th year in 2025/6 and we believe that achieving the aims in this Corporate Plan will provide strong foundations upon which to realign our homes and services for women to our original mission, moving from ‘good to great’.

Our full Corporate Plan can be viewed here:
 hfw.org.uk/about-us/corporate-information

Corporate plan Summary

OUR VISION

Deliver homes that women can be proud of and services they can trust

2022-27 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Positive outcomes for our customers
- Deliver homes where women want to live
- Grow high quality support services

ENABLING OBJECTIVES

- Our People are valued and enabled to deliver quality services to our customers
- Our efficient processes and quality data drive decision making, Value for money and risk management
- Our financial resilience is strengthened

KEY STRATEGIES

- Customer First Strategy
- Asset Management Strategy
- People Strategy
- Supported Services Strategy

ENABLERS

Human Resources; Information Technology; Finance & Treasury; Communications; Risk Management and Governance, Customer feedback, Innovation/Transformation, Partners

OUR MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Annual plan objectives, KPI's, budget
- Departmental and team plans and individual objectives



Your views...

Customer Satisfaction Survey results April 2023

During February and March 2023, many of you took part in an important survey.

The survey focused on how happy you are with the way we are delivering key services and maintaining your homes as well as what further support you would like. This survey also included questions that have been set by the Regulator of Social Housing called Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

The survey was anonymous and carried out by an independent market research company – Acuity Research and Practice.

The findings will inform our future strategic and operational planning.

270 residents took part out of a total of 920

Thank you to everyone that took part!



A summary of the results

38% of residents are satisfied with the overall service provided by Housing for Women

48% of residents are satisfied that we provide a home that is safe

54% of residents are satisfied with the overall repair service from us over the last 12 months

40% of residents are satisfied with our approach to handling anti-social behaviour

34% of residents find housing for women easy to deal with

27% of residents are satisfied that we listen to their views and act upon them

The full report can be viewed here:

hfw.org.uk/media/70358/housing-for-women-tsm-2023-tfr-v1.pdf

Whilst the results of this survey are disappointing, they are not surprising and as mentioned above, they endorse the 'Back to Basics' approach of the first 3 years of our Corporate Plan and our 'Customer First Strategy'....

We will be running this survey again in the Autumn and hope that those results show that the plans and the actions we are taking are making a positive difference.

In the meantime, our operational indicators are encouraging:

Summary performance at end March 2023

Routine repairs completed within target timescale **86%**

Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair **94%**

83% satisfaction with gas servicing

Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour **40%**

74% of Customer Service call backs in 2 working days

73% Customer Service emails responded to in 2 working days

61% of all complaints were responded to within target

Customer First Strategy

Our Customer First Strategy firmly places our customers at the very heart of all we do. It recognises that collaboration with our customers in creating, scrutinising, and improving our services is essential if we are to tailor and strengthen our services and offer better value for money.

We need to listen, understand and learn from our customers' voice in order to bring about business-wide change and service improvement.

Our Customer Service Team are key to the delivery of this strategy supporting teams across the business and you can read more about them on page 6.

“Creating our Customer First Strategy has been an important and rewarding exercise. For the first time, we have a comprehensive body of customer insight, which is helping to deepen our understanding of our customers current and future needs.

Our customers have been very clear: listen to me, empower me, and improve my services.

Equipped with that understanding, we now have the opportunity and the resolve to ensure they have a positive and meaningful experience across all our services. I am excited to continue this conversation with our customers as we take the journey to become a customer-driven business.”

Mandy Dunstan - Director of Operations

Our Customer First Strategy identifies six themes that will support us in our journey to become a truly modern housing association:



Relationships

We will treat customers with respect in all our communications and interactions.



Quality

Customers can expect their home to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.



Communication

Customers will receive clear, accessible, timely information from Housing for Women on the issues that matter to them.



Accountability

Collectively, our customers will work in partnership with Housing for Women to independently scrutinise and hold us to account for the decisions that affect your services.



Voice and Influence

Customer views will be sought and valued, and used to inform decisions. Each customer will feel listened to by us on the issues that matter and can speak freely



When things go wrong

Customers will have simple, accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints, and seeking redress. They will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

Our Customer Service Team

Housing for Women's Customer Service Team has been in place since March 2023.

We are focussed on managing all our customer contact in one place including:

- + Dealing with all queries at the first point of contact wherever possible, enabling efficient service delivery
- + Signposting queries and service requests to the right people/team
- + Reducing the number of queries that the operational teams deal with freeing them up to deliver more face-to-face services
- + Aim to build trust and improved relationships with our customers by having a consistent approach supported by our new housing system which enables the team to log and track all contacts.

In addition, the Team are:

- + Developing a greater understanding of who our customers through surveys/complaints/tenancy audits etc
- + Developing our Customer Panels to better represent the Customer Voice and embed a customer-centric culture across our business.

You can reach our Customer Service Team on **020 7501 6120** during office hours (9am-5pm, Mon to Fri). We are closed every Thursday morning till 11am for training purposes – during this time you can leave a voicemail with your details and a member of team will call you back.

For emergencies outside of office hours, our contractor partner Careium, is available to answer your call.

For all non-urgent enquiries, you can contact us via email: **customer.service@h4w.co.uk** – We will respond to your query within two working days.

If you are unhappy with any of the services you have received and would like to make a complaint, please email **complaints@h4w.co.uk**. Once received, our Team will log and acknowledge your complaint within two working days.

Customer Service Training

We will be closed between 9am-11am on Thursday mornings until November as our teams undergo training. Please only contact us during this time if it is an emergency. We appreciate your understanding whilst we work to improve our services.

“Both the service and team are still new, and we are continually learning and making improvements to provide you with the service you deserve. We welcome your feedback and would love to hear how we are doing.”

Customer Service Manager,
Dominique Benjamin



Rent and Service Charges for 2023/24

Like all social landlords, we review our Rent and Service Charges every year. At Housing for Women, this process is carried out during the summer and any changes take place in the autumn.

Over the coming weeks, you will receive a letter from us advising you of your rent and services charges for the coming year 2023/24. Any changes will take effect from the beginning of October.

Will my Rent and Service Charge be increasing?

As you will have seen in the news, inflation is currently very high, much higher than it has been for a long time. This affects your personal/household costs and also significantly impacts all our costs and those of our suppliers.

Like other Housing Associations, the rent we charge is our primary source of income. It pays for all the repairs that are needed each year, as well as the management of our properties. It also helps pay the interest on any loans we have taken out to invest in our homes for the future. The Government sets a cap on the maximum increase we can apply to our rents.

Service Charges are an amount that tenants pay to cover the cost of providing communal or shared services to a building and block/estate, to ensure their upkeep, safety, and maintenance.

It is likely that there will be an increase in both your rent and

service charge for next year. The details of this are still being reviewed and our Board will make the final decision on the level of the increase.

Struggling to pay your rent?

It's crucial that you pay your rent and service charges on time. Failure to pay may result in legal action, which could result in you losing your home.

It's easier to pay your rent by direct debit, but there are several other options available to you, such as a standing order, online banking, and Pay Point. Further details about how you can pay your rent are on our website. Click here for more information:

hfw.org.uk/residents/living-with-us/rent-and-charges

Getting Help

We appreciate that you may be concerned about the impact of any changes to our rents and service charges as well as the current cost-of-living crisis. We understand that everyone's circumstances are different and that some of you, at some stage, may experience financial difficulties which can prevent you from paying your rent.

If you are struggling to pay your rent or fall into arrears, please contact a member of our Income Team on 020 7501 6120 to immediately agree on a repayment plan and stop action. We can also offer you guidance on how immediately to maximise your income and/or refer you to other agencies who can support you with managing any debts you may have.

If you have difficulty meeting the cost of your rent and other household bills, there are organisations that can help:



Citizens Advice

There is a network of Citizens Advice offices across London providing walk-in advice

and assistance. The Citizens Advice website is also a great source of information.



Turn 2 Us

Provides a free helpline for those needing internet access or help

going online. Their number is 080 802 2000, 9-5 weekdays.



Help to Buy Milk

If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant, know someone who is, or have a child under four, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk. For more information about the programme, which is part of the NHS' Healthy Start scheme, please go to www.healthystart.nhs.uk



Get help to buy food and milk
(the Healthy Start scheme)

What is Healthy Start?

If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk.

If you're eligible, you'll be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that you can use in some UK shops. We'll add your benefit onto this card every 4 weeks.

You can use your card to buy:

- plain liquid cow's milk
- fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables
- fresh, dried, and tinned pulses
- infant formula milk based on cow's milk

You can also use your card to collect:

- Healthy Start vitamins – these support you during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- vitamin drops for babies and young children – these are suitable from birth to 4 years old

Frequently asked questions
Frequently asked questions that people may have about the Healthy Start scheme

Our Customer Service operation will be closed between 9am-11am on Thursday mornings until November as our teams undergo training. Please only contact us during this time if it is an emergency. We appreciate your understanding whilst we continuously work to improve our services.



Tackling Anti-Social behaviour

Working with the local Police in Lewisham, Housing for Women successfully obtained a Premises Closure Order at Bromley Magistrates Court in March.

The Order enabled us to close down a property following ongoing anti-social behaviour and criminal activity that has been negatively impacting on our residents and the local community. In addition, our application for possession of the property was granted as the resident was found to be in breach of their tenancy due to their persistent anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. Subject to a warrant for possession being granted by the court, the tenant will face eviction.

Anti-social or criminal behaviour will not be tolerated in our properties. If you wish to report such activity, don't hesitate to contact our Customer Service Team on **0207 501 6120**, who we will be happy to assist you.

“There are various legal tools we can use to combat anti-social and criminal behaviour. One includes Premises Closure Orders, which can prohibit disruptive residents from accessing their homes. These orders can last up to three months”.

Samantha Gibbs, Housing Team Leader



Design a card Competition “Welcome to your New Home”

Do you love drawing and painting? If so, we need your help to design a “Welcome to your New Home” card for new Housing for Women residents.

Be as creative as you like, using bright colours and shapes to bring your design to life. There will be a £25 Voucher for the winning entry!

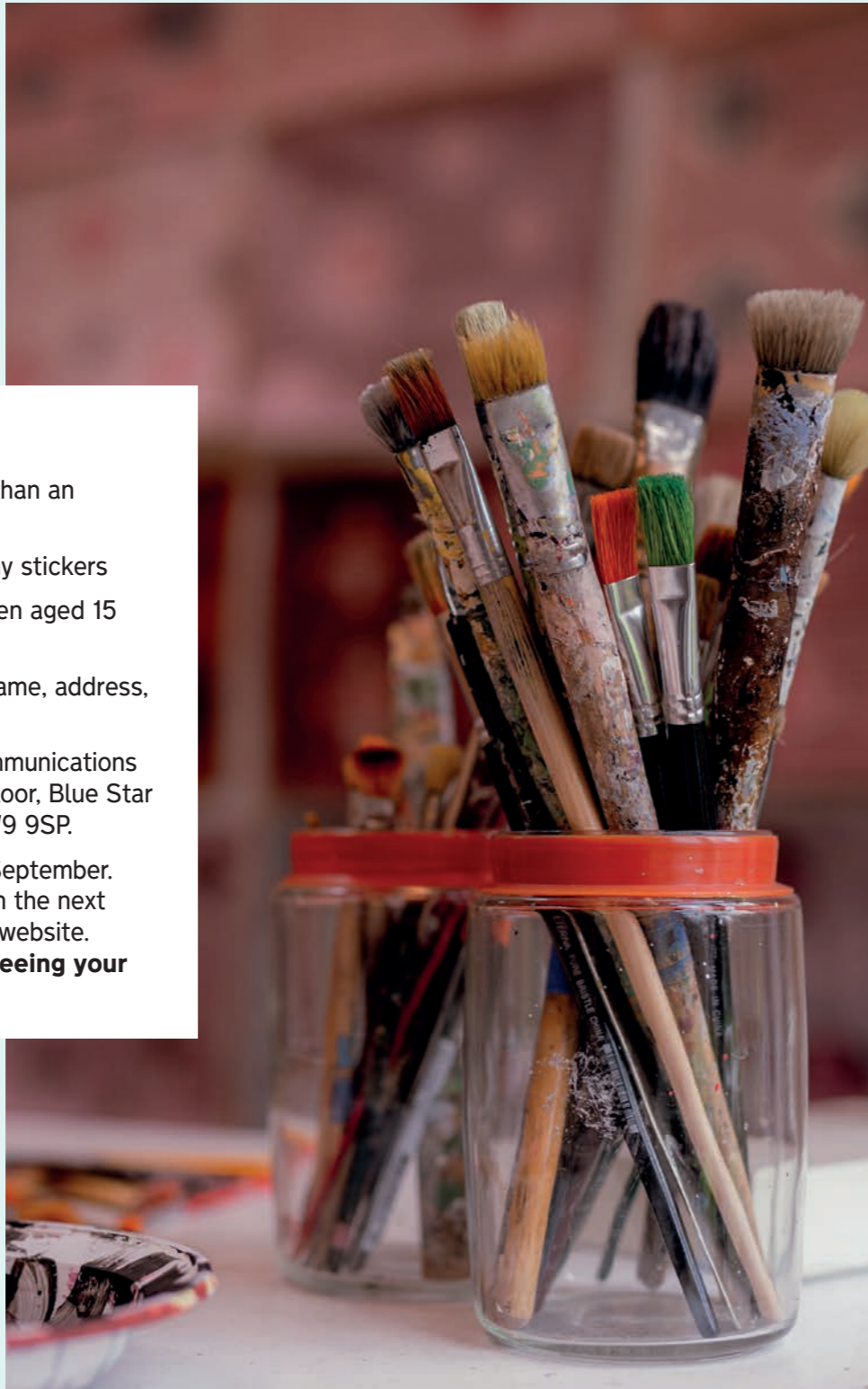
Guidelines:

- + Your design should be no bigger than an A4-sized piece of paper.
- + Be careful not to use glitter or any stickers
- + The competition is open to children aged 15 and below
- + Please make sure you add your name, address, and age to your entry

Please send your artwork to: Communications Team at Housing for Women, Sixth Floor, Blue Star House, 234-244 Stockwell Road, SW9 9SP.

The competition closes on Friday, 1 September. The winning entry will be published in the next edition of the newsletter and on our website.

Good luck – we look forward to seeing your work!



Beat the Heat

Our summers are getting hotter. In fact, last year’s July heatwave smashed dozens of records across the UK.

While people are happy to see the sun after a long, dreary winter, many of us are unprepared for hot weather. This includes our homes, which are designed to keep us warm, not cold. With extreme temperatures forecast this summer, here are some tips on how to cope with the heat.

If you go outside

Make sure you and your children wear appropriate clothing (white is the best), a hat and plenty of sunscreen. Bring a brolly for extra shade. Remember to drink lots of water to keep hydrated.

Close your windows and curtains

Swinging open the windows at the first sign of heat might be tempting, but this could backfire. To keep your home cool, you need to keep hot air out.

This means shutting your windows during the day, especially if you have south-facing windows. Keep your blinds down and curtains drawn too. When temperatures drop, open your windows at night to let cooler air in.

Create a cross-breeze

Yes, we said to keep your windows closed. But sometimes, we need to feel a breeze in hot weather. If you need to open a window, try to get air flowing through your home.

This means opening windows at opposite ends of your home and keeping doors open so air can move freely. Keep curtains and blinds closed or partially shut to deflect direct sunlight.

Put out bowls of water

Leaving bowls of water around might seem strange, but doing so can help cool hot air.

If you have a fan use it wisely

Electric fans are a great way to keep cool. But, since they use energy, ensure you get the most out of them.

Heat rises, so put your fan on the floor and point it upwards.

Point it towards the opposite wall (ideally with no large objects in the way). This will help bounce cooler air off the wall and back into your room. If your fan has a timer, use it to ensure it is only switched on when needed – allowing you to save energy and your electric bills.

Try an ice fan

Place a bowl of ice or cold water in front of your fan’s blades so the air blows across it. This will send icy water droplets around the room.

Shower before bed

Taking a warm shower or bath is one of the quickest ways to cool down before bed. Avoid turning the cold water on, which can stimulate your skin and wake you up. A warmer shower will encourage your body to release heat to the surface of your skin and can encourage you to sleep.

Use your hot water bottle as an ice pack

Fill your hot water bottle with water and put it in the freezer for a few hours. Once frozen, put this in your bed before you get in, or place it under your feet to help you keep cool as you drift off.



USEFUL INFORMATION

Visiting your home

We are committed to keeping your home safe, as well as meeting the legal standards required of us as landlords. To do this, we will sometimes need to visit you in your home to carry out safety and compliance checks. We are also carrying out home condition surveys to assess the quality of our homes and plan any necessary improvements.

Please help us when we need to come to your home by:

- + Allowing our staff and contractors into your home at an agreed time and date
- + Letting us know if you are unable to give us access to your home for any reason
- + Keeping your contact details up to date on your records so we can arrange appointments with you.

Paying your rent

Paying your rent on time should be a financial priority each month. It forms part of your tenancy agreement with us. Whether you pay your rent yourself, or it is funded by someone else such as your local Housing Benefit office or Universal Credit, it's your responsibility to make sure that your rent gets paid.



What is 'Connect'?

'Connect' is designed for you, and so if you have anything you would like us to cover in future issues or you have a comment to make, please do let us know by writing to: Connect Editor, Housing for Women, Sixth Floor, Blue Star House, 234 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9SP or emailing customerservice@h4w.co.uk.

Head Office and Registered Office

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Housing4Women

Registered Charity No. 211351