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**Domestic Abuse Services**  
For over 40 years, Housing for Women has been supporting women and children in London escaping domestic violence and abuse.

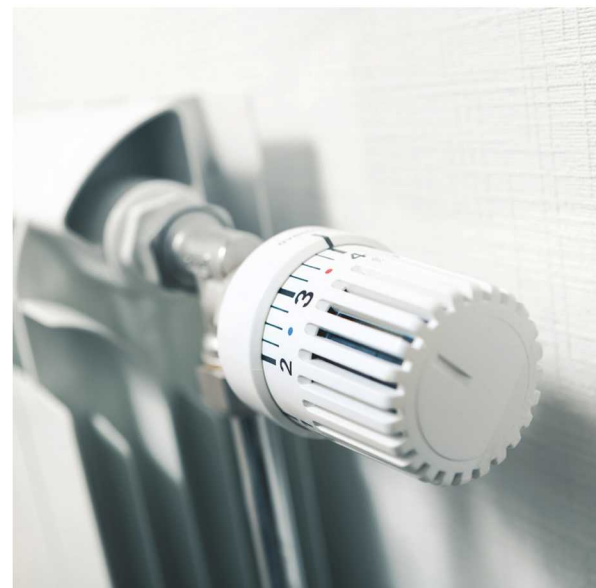
## Improving your homes and services

### Welcome to the Autumn Edition of Connect, your Resident Newsletter

We hope you've all been keeping well over the last few months, and the return to school, college and work is helping you return to a 'normal' routine.

Our Asset Management Team have been busy with projects and new services, which will help us improve your homes. In this issue you can find out about our upcoming stock condition surveys, which will give us a better understanding of the condition of your homes, as well as what you need to do to prepare for them. We're also getting closer to the launch of our new repairs and maintenance service. Read more about our partners, MCP property services on page 7.

Getting ahead of the cold weather, we've got some useful information about keeping your homes warm this winter, including the additional financial support you might be entitled to.



Finally, do you want to help us improve our services? We're looking for residents volunteers to get involved, give us feedback, and help shape our service delivery. Find out more on page 9.

## Stock condition surveys

Starting this month we will be undertaking a stock condition survey of your homes. Some of you may have already received your appointment letters from our partners Rand Associates, a multi-disciplinary practice of Quantity Surveyors and Building Surveyors. In the coming months they will carry out a 100% stock condition survey to assess the condition of all our assets, including your homes and blocks.

A stock condition survey is a detailed inspection of your home, both internally and externally. The survey helps us assess the age and condition of each building and property, as well as the components, such as kitchens and bathrooms, within it. We are carrying out the survey to allow us to understand the conditions of our properties and homes and find out what the investments needs for them are. A stock condition survey is a crucial investment in our homes.

This survey is essential for us to gather information to make sure that we are adhering to the Government's 'Decent Home Standard.' The information we collect regarding the condition of our properties will help us ensure that all homes are safe and maintained to a decent standard. As well as the general condition of our assets and their components, we will be reviewing the compliance of our assets.

Rand Associates will be leading on the programme and will contact you directly to arrange appointments for their surveyors to come and look at your homes. All surveyors will carry a Rand Associates ID badge and will be following COVID-19 health and safety procedures.



Your survey appointment should take around 30 minutes to complete. The surveyor will need to go into each room of your house to carry out the survey and may need to take photos as part of the process. Surveyors will not need to lift carpets or move any furniture.

When your neighbourhood is due to be surveyed you will receive a letter from Rand Associates to let you know when they will be in your area. If you need to amend your allocated appointment time, you can contact Rand Associates directly using the contact information provided.

It is very important that surveyors can gain access to your home to complete the survey. The information we gather will help us plan improvements to your homes, leading to fewer repairs and better homes.

Please note the survey does not collect information on any outstanding repairs to your home. If you need to report a repair, please do this in the normal way, via the customer portal, emailing [repairs@h4w.co.uk](mailto:repairs@h4w.co.uk) or calling **020 7501 6120** and pressing **3** for repairs.



# WE CAN ADVISE

## Changes to Universal Credit

You are probably aware by now that the Government will be withdrawing the £20 top up to Universal Credit introduced in April last year for families on low income.

For some this could lead to difficulty in paying your rent. Our job in the housing management and income team isn't only to ensure that your rent is paid, but that you have access to all the support available to enable you to be in a position to do so.

Another big change is the end to the furlough scheme last month. If you believe you'll have difficulty paying your rent as a result, please contact your Neighbourhood Officer on **020 7501 6120** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, or on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

Your Neighbourhood Officer can help you find:

- + debt advice
- + budgeting advice
- + benefit support, advice and appeals
- + employment support
- + advice on welfare reforms and access to support

Please get in touch today, don't delay!

**WE'RE HERE TO PROVIDE SENSITIVE, NON-JUDGEMENTAL SUPPORT AND ADVICE.**



**OMOJEFE**

Neighbourhood Manager



# Staying warm in your homes

As the weather changes and the days start getting colder and shorter, you'll be using more energy to heat your homes. It's forecast that many households will face high energy bills this winter, so as your Landlord we wanted to let you know what financial support you could be entitled to in the autumn and winter months. There are several schemes, grants and benefits available to help you pay your gas and electricity bills to help keep you safe and warm.

## Warm home discount

This government scheme could save you £140 off your electricity bill for winter 2021 to 2022. The scheme opens on October 18 2021. The money is not paid to you – it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill between October 2021 – March 2022.

### Who can apply?

You can apply for the scheme if you receive the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit (known as the 'core group') or you are on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for the scheme (known as the 'broader group').



For more information on how to apply visit: [Warm Home Discount Scheme](#).

The discount will not affect your cold weather payment or winter fuel payment.

## Cold weather payment

If the weather in your local area drops to or below zero degrees celsius, for more than 7 consecutive days between 1 November 2021 and 31 March 2022, you could be entitled to an extra payment of £25 for each day.

### Who can apply?

You can apply if you receive a range of benefits including, income support, pension credit, income-based jobseeker's allowance, universal credit, income-related employment and support allowance and support for mortgage interest.



For more information on how to apply visit: [Cold Weather Payment](#).

## Winter fuel payment

This government scheme entitles older citizens to between £100-£300 towards their heating bill in the winter of 2021-2022. You have up until 31 March to make a claim for winter 2021-2022.

### Who can apply?

You can apply if you meet all of the following criteria:

- + Have been born on or before 26 September 1955 (the eligibility birth date changes every financial year).
- + Lived in the UK for a least one day during the week of 20-26 September 2021 (the qualifying week for the financial year of 2021-2022).

You can call the Winter Fuel Payment helpline on **0800 731 01610** for more information on eligibility and help if you are claiming for the first time.



Or visit [Winter Fuel Payment](#).



## Household support fund

This new fund will assist vulnerable households to help meet daily needs including food, clothing and utility bills.

It is thought the money may be given out in the form of small grants but local councils will distribute the money as they see fit. The money will be available to local authorities this month.



For more information visit: [GOV.UK](#).

### How can I apply?

The Household Support Fund is aimed to help households who are affected by the recent £20 cut to universal credit. If you are affected by the cut please contact your local council in order to place a claim for the new fund.

To find out who your local council is visit: [Find your local council](#).

## Charitable grants

There are a range of charities that offer grants to help people with various different things to help improve individuals quality of life, including help paying utility bills. The grants accessible depend on a person's specific circumstances such as their age or income. To find out what help may be available to you from grant giving charities you can use the [Turn2us grant search](#).

## Energy companies

Some energy companies offer [schemes or grants](#) to help customers cover their energy bills. So ask your energy provider if there are any grants they can offer you. The British Gas Energy Trust is accessible to anyone you don't have to be a customer to apply.

## More information

- + For advice on energy bills and energy efficiency contact visit [Simple Energy Advice](#) or call **0800 44202**.
- + If you are struggling to manage your bills visit [Step Change](#) for free online debt advice.
- + Check [Benefits Checker](#) to ensure you are claiming all of the benefits you are entitled to.



## How to be more sustainable on a budget

With the COP26 summit on climate change fast approaching at the end of the month, it is important to take time and reflect on your actions and consider any changes you can make in your daily routine to become more sustainable. In today's society the ability to make sustainable choices is often linked to expensive options but this doesn't have to be the case. There are a number of inexpensive changes you can adopt on a budget.

Here are seven things you can say goodbye to in your daily life to help you become more sustainable:

### 1. Say goodbye to buying new

Buying used items instead of new is a great way to look after the environment and also save money. Going to charity shops or car boot sales, as well as visiting websites like Facebook Marketplace and Depop are a good way to find used items for a great price.

### 2. Say goodbye to plastic bottles

Not only will a reusable bottle help reduce single use plastic waste, it will also save you money. The costs of regularly buying cheap plastic bottles can add up overtime. There are so many reusable bottles out there, you can definitely find one that you will love using every day.

### 3. Say goodbye to paper towels

Instead of buying a pack of paper towels each week, use a sponge to wipe your kitchen tops and clean up any floor spillage. Paper towels can only be used once causing them to be less resourceful and energy efficient.

### 4. Say goodbye to meat

You do not have to turn completely vegetarian or vegan, simply cutting down on your meat consumption is a great way to help the environment. Start off easy, have one or two meat free days a week and see how you feel!

### 5. Say goodbye to plastic produce bags

When buying fresh fruit and veg ditch the plastic produce bag and instead place the items straight in your shopping trolley or basket. Cashiers do not mind and you can wash your produce when you get home to ensure it is clean. Alternatively you can use reusable cloth bags to transport your items around.

### 6. Say goodbye to coffee shops

It is extremely tempting to quickly pop into your local coffee shop in the morning, but making a coffee at home and putting it in a flask helps reduce waste and saves you money.

### 7. Say goodbye to plastic toothbrushes

Switch your plastic toothbrush for a bamboo toothbrush. The price difference isn't too much but the impact on the environment is massive. Broken-down pieces of plastic toothbrushes are a common item found floating in the ocean so why not make the change now!

**REMEMBER  
MAKING A SMALL  
CHANGE CAN  
MAKE A BIG  
DIFFERENCE.**

## Our new repairs and maintenance service

We are getting closer and closer to launching our new repairs and maintenance service with our selected delivery partners MCP Property Services. By the end of this month MCP will be delivering all the repairs and maintenance in your homes.



We're really pleased to be working with this family-run business, who have an excellent reputation across the social housing sector. MCP pride themselves on people-centred delivery and we're sure you're going to see an improvement in both service and communication.

MCP have a strong reputation across the social housing sector and pride themselves on people-centred delivery. They are a family-run business, who share our values and we are over the moon to be working with them.

We have listened to your feedback about the delivery of our repairs service over the past few years and have been working to establish the best way to deliver improvement. This relationship with MCP will provide residents with a seamless service including confirmed appointments at first point of contact with the goal of "self-service" management of repairs appointments for residents in the future. MCP are also committed to delivering most repairs through their own team, rather than sub-contractors; a dedicated 'Housing for Women team' of MCP staff to deliver a better service for you.

### What happens next?

We're currently set to launch the new repairs service on 22nd October 2021.

MCP have started booking appointments ahead of this date and are calling our customers directly to arrange convenient dates and times.

Please continue to report repairs in the same way you always have, via your tenant portal, by email to [repairs@h4w.co.uk](mailto:repairs@h4w.co.uk) or by phone to **0207 501 6120** selecting option **3**. As soon as you report a repair, you will be supported by a dedicated MCP Repairs Planner. They will take your repair details and book an appointment during that first phone call.

If you are following up on an old repair, MCP will transfer you back to a member of the Housing For Women Property Services Team who will be able to assist.

We are not anticipating any delays to the launch day but of course we are carefully reviewing this to ensure we have all the systems and processes required for a successful start – we will let you know if there are any changes.



MARK



## Meet the team Estate Services Officers

Mark and Thomas are Estate Services Officers at Housing for Women. Their very busy jobs involve visiting your estates and neighbourhoods to make sure there are no problems with your homes. We find out about the wide variety of things they are responsible for, what a typical day looks like for them, and the difficulty of London parking.



THOMAS

### What is your role and what are you responsible for?

We carry out estate inspections weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, six monthly or annually, depending on the requirements of each estate. Estate inspections help us to:

- + identify any repairs needed in communal areas
- + make sure that there are no health and safety issues
- + make sure that the area is being looked after and kept clean
- + check for any abandoned vehicles and help arrange for their removal
- + get residents involved in their neighbourhoods and keep them engaged and informed
- + represent Housing for Women and be a contact for residents who need support with their homes
- + identify and quickly resolve any signs of anti-social behaviour
- + arrange for the removal of any bulk rubbish or inappropriately disposed household rubbish.

### What does a typical day at work look like for you?

On a typical day we will try to inspect at least four properties, this can sometimes depend on how busy we are, or if we've been given specific instructions to visit a particular site.

On each estate inspection we will take notes and respond to any issues we find. This includes all the things you might expect, such as cleanliness, rubbish and fly-tipping, vandalism and graffiti, and some things you might not, like checking for uneven pavements or damaged trees.

Our job is to help keep residents safe in their homes, as well as checking any health and safety issues we will make sure we carry out fire risk assessments, and make sure that communal areas are being kept clear in case of any emergencies and fire exits are not obstructed.

Lastly if there is any damage to communal doors or gates, or lighting that needs replacing or repairing, we will make a note and have this taken care of as soon as possible.

We have an Estate Inspection Checklist which is used to record the findings of each inspection. Once the checklist is signed-off, we file it to make sure we have records of the upkeep of our estates.

### What is most challenging about the role?

Parking can be difficult as we do not hold a borough-by-borough dispensation permit it can result in spending some considerable time locating a pay by phone and/or pay meter bay available for use.

### Tell us something great about your job

H4W procurement recently acquired brand new Company vans for our use, and as we spend a large part of our day driving from one property to the next it is always a bonus if journeys made can be comfortable ones.

## Help us improve your services

Do you have two hours a month to spare to help bring you the best service? We're working hard to improve our services and want this to hear from our residents to make sure we're getting it right.



We're looking for resident volunteers who can get involved behind the scenes at Housing for Women including:

- + Meeting with our Board
- + Reviewing our current processes and ways of working
- + Attending meetings with MCP our new responsive repairs service, to give feedback on the new service
- + Helping us review our processes and policy to improve services
- + Providing essential feedback to our teams about our services

You don't need any previous experience of the housing sector, we're just looking for residents who are willing to take part in meetings, give us feedback, and help represent you and your neighbours.

Most of the meetings will be held virtually to begin with but can be in person if you'd prefer.

If you would like to find out more about this opportunity, please email Yasmeen Mahmood – [Yasmeen.mahmood@h4w.co.uk](mailto:Yasmeen.mahmood@h4w.co.uk) to arrange an informal chat about the role.



YASMEEN

Complaints  
performance

July-October 2021

73% **Handled in time**

19 **Total complaints**

7 **Received for neighbourhood**

8 **Received for maintenance & repairs**



# Ways to pay your rent?

Your rent is due each month in advance. It is due on the first day of each month. You can use any of the following methods to pay your rent or other charges:



## Direct Debit or Standing Order



## Online via the Customer Portal

Visit [my.hfw.org.uk](http://my.hfw.org.uk)



## Online using Allpay

Pay online at [www.allpayments.net](http://www.allpayments.net)



## Telephone

If you have an Allpay card you can call their 24-hour payment line on **0330 041 6497**



## Cheques

Please make cheques payable to Housing for Women. Please put your tenant number and address on the reverse.



## Shops

You can pay at any shop displaying the PayPoint, Post Office or allpay.net signs



## Internet banking

If you bank online, you can set up either a standing order or a one-off payment. Please ensure you quote your tenant reference number as the reference. Please quote Sort Code: **30-00-09** Quote bank Account: **00025164**

## Top tips for Universal Credit Claimants

Universal Credit is a new type of benefit which replaces Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Working Tax Credit.

These are our top tips for being organised and making sure that your claim for Universal Credit goes as smoothly as possible.

## Accept Your Claimant Commitment

When you make your claim for Universal Credit you must accept your claimant commitment online within 7 days otherwise your claim

with be closed and you will need to start your claim again.

## Changes in Your Circumstances

Once you are claiming Universal Credit you are required to maintain your claimant commitment to find work, increase your hours and/or engage in work related activities with your Work Coach. This is called conditionality and if you do not complete it you may face a reduction of your payments.

If you are unable to carry out your claimant commitment due to a change in circumstances, please let your Work Coach know as soon as possible so they can temporarily amend your agreed duties.

## Thought about paying your rent by Direct Debit?

Set up today to be automatically enrolled into a £50 gift card prize draw. A new winner will be selected each quarter! To set up visit [www.hfw.org.uk/resident-area/rent-charges](http://www.hfw.org.uk/resident-area/rent-charges) to download the direct debit form and return it to us.



## Paying Your Rent

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

## Customer Portal

Don't forget you can pay your rent, and book repairs through the Customer Portal.

Sign up now at [www.hfw.org.uk/residents/customer-portal](http://www.hfw.org.uk/residents/customer-portal)



## Service Charges

Housing for Women as your landlord is reviewing your service charge, the process for setting it and the consultation with you before any service charge demand is made. You'll only be charged for the services you use. We'll also ask you if there are specific other services you want us to provide.

As soon as your service charge is set we will contact you to discuss any changes.

## Problems paying your rent?

If your rent is not paid the money owed is called 'rent arrears'. Rent arrears are a priority debt. Your rent arrears is a priority debt because there are more serious consequences if you don't pay them. The result of not dealing with it could mean losing your tenancy.

Our job in the housing management and income team isn't only to ensure that your rent is paid, but that you have access to all of the support available to enable you to be in a position to do so.

If you are having difficulty paying your rent, you should contact your Neighbourhood Officer on **020 7501 6120** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, or on Facebook, and Instagram.

Our approach will be caring, empathetic and sensitive.

Your Neighbourhood Officer will inform you were to get:

- + debt advice
- + budgeting advice
- + benefit support, advice and appeals
- + employment support
- + advice on welfare reforms and access to support

## If you don't pay

As your landlord we may seek a court order to ensure you pay your rent as and when due. We are here to help you get back on track to clear your rent arrears.

**Get in touch today, don't delay!**



# TAKE NOTE!

## Customer Hub

Our new telephone system will make it easier for you to contact us, get through to the right department, and have your questions answered.

As part of the new system, our Housing Officers will no longer have individual mobile telephone numbers. Any previous contact numbers are no longer in use.

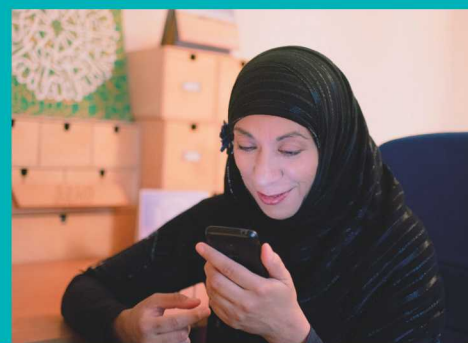
All calls need to go through our main number, **020 7501 6120**, so you can get all the help you need.

## Visiting your home

We are committed to keeping your home safe and in a good condition, as well as meeting the legal standards required of us as landlords. In order 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 a home condition survey to assess the quality of our properties and plan any necessary improvements to your living conditions.

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

- + Allowing our staff and contractors into your home at an agreed upon 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.



## Complaints and compliments

We aim to provide you with good quality services, but we can only be sure we are succeeding if you let us know. 2020 gave us new challenges in supporting you and delivering our services, and we are always pleased to hear how we helped or how we can improve.

There are a number of ways you can get in touch to give us feedback or make a complaint:

1. Completing the online complaints form: [www.hfw.org.uk/contact-us/complaints-compliments/](http://www.hfw.org.uk/contact-us/complaints-compliments/)
2. Emailing us at: [complaints@h4w.co.uk](mailto:complaints@h4w.co.uk)
3. Via the **Customer Portal**
4. Contacting us on **social media** – We will reply via Direct Message to obtain your name and contact details so we can help. Please remember never to share your personal details publicly.



### Your voice

'Brighter Futures' 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: Brighter Futures Editor, Housing for Women, Sixth Floor, Blue Star House, 234 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9SP or emailing [Communications@h4w.co.uk](mailto:Communications@h4w.co.uk).

### Head Office and Registered Office

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[www.hfw.org.uk](http://www.hfw.org.uk)

Housing4Women



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