



**Black Country
Housing Group**

Customer Broadcast

November 2024



Introduction

Welcome to your Customer Broadcast. This newsletter gives us the opportunity to give you up to date information and reminders. In this edition we introduce our new BCHG Board Chair Sinéad Butters, share detail about the winter fuel payment and raise your awareness on illegal money lenders. There is a reminder on damp and condensation and what we do to keep you safe. You'll also read about the 2024 Customer Scrutiny Conference and this year's garden competition winners.

**Ramesh Malhan,
Head of Customer Voice**



Welcome to new BCHG Board Chair

I am thrilled to be joining the BCHG Board as Chair and am looking forward to working in collaboration with you to understand what matters to you most.

I have a strong background in housing and am passionate about the role housing associations play in creating vibrant, sustainable communities.

It was fantastic to meet some of you during this year's Customer Scrutiny Conference and hear your feedback. 'Your Voice, Your Approval' was this year's theme, focusing on three areas for improvement raised by our customers – you can find out more about the conference below.

**Sinéad Butters,
Chair of BCHG Board**



Important Update on Winter Fuel Payments

You may have heard that the government has changed the rules regarding winter fuel payments. Starting this winter, households will no longer be eligible for these payments unless they receive pension credit or other certain means tested benefits. Your Customer Relations Manager or Scheme Manager will be reaching out to you to determine your eligibility for pension credit. You can also check your eligibility yourself through the following link <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator>

If you do not qualify for pension credit or any other means tested benefits and require additional support this winter, please contact your CRM, Scheme Manager, or visit our website <https://www.bchg.co.uk/rents-and-charges/cost-of-living-support/>

BCHG Online

You will have noted that the current customer portal has been offline for a few weeks. This is because we are currently building a brand-new portal. Whilst our new and improved digital service BCHG Online is in its final stages of development, you are still able to pay rent via AllPay here: <https://pay.allpay.net/blackcountryhg> and report repairs by emailing homeforcejobs@bchg.co.uk or calling 0300 555 0302.

If you need to check your rent statement, your tenancy agreement or get a breakdown of your rent and service charges, please contact your Customer Relations Manager or Scheme Manager: <https://www.bchg.co.uk/contact-us/>



Action Required on Benefit Changes

The Government is in its last phase of moving customers who receive benefits such as tax credits, housing benefit and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) onto one benefit called Universal Credit. All migration notices are expected to be sent out by the end of this year. If you receive a letter, it is important that you take action promptly to avoid any delays in payments. If you need assistance, please contact your CRM or Scheme Manager.

Loan Sharks

Illegal money lenders, also known as Loan Sharks, come in all shapes and sizes and from all age groups. They prey on people wherever they are vulnerable and pretend to be friendly, offering a favour of lending some much-needed cash.

If you're unsure whether or not you might be a victim to a Loan Shark, here are some warning signs that might help you spot them:

- Giving you no paperwork or agreement on a loan
- Refusing to give you information about the loan
- Keeping items until the debt is paid such as your bank card or passport
- Taking things from you if you do not pay on time
- Adding more interest or charges so the debt never goes down
- Using intimidation or violence if you do not pay



Reducing Condensation in your Home

With the colder damper days among us, it is important to remember how to reduce condensation in your home. Here are some tips:

- To reduce the moisture in your home, dry clothes outside if possible and never dry them on radiators
- Ensure you ventilate your home to get rid of moisture
- Allow space for air to circulate in and around your furniture

For further guidance, please read this condensation leaflet here:
<https://www.bchg.co.uk/media/e0pncha2/condensation-leaflet.pdf>

You can find further helpful advice via the resources below:

- <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/seasonal-advice/your-home/protecting-your-property-from-winter-weather>
- <https://hoa.org.uk/advice/guides-for-homeowners/for-owners/how-to-keep-a-house-warm-in-winter/>
- Damp, Mould and Condensation Video -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP7D-t5wfZc>

If you spot mould in your home, please contact our repairs team Homeforce immediately via email homeforcejobs@bchg.co.uk

You can also find our Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy and other Policies here:
<https://www.bchg.co.uk/information-and-publications/transparency-policy-and-other-key-policies/>

Our grounds maintenance team are preparing for winter and in the process of checking grit bins and installing new one across our estates at:

- Ross Heights
- Park Moor Gardens
- Malin Gardens
- Whitepoplars Close



How We Keep Homes Decent and Safe

Our Asset team make sure you are safe and live in a decent home. We ensure the required compliance checks are carried out in order for your home to meet the laws and regulations.

As a social housing provider, we comply with laws and regulation on safety, maintenance, accessibility, and energy efficiency. We want you to know about some of the key items we do to give you a peace of mind and keep you safe, they come under an acronym **FLAGE**.

F – Fire Risk Assessment – we complete and review them for shared buildings and take into account customers with any special requirements, like mobility.

L – Legionella Risk Assessment - testing water sources in shared buildings.

L – Lifts – we arrange a regular inspection.

A – Asbestos Survey – arrange for professionals to remove any dangerous asbestos identified.

G – Gas – to complete every year and landlord gas safety inspection and general servicing for the upkeep of your central heating system.

E – Electric – a competent electrician carries an inspection every 5 years, we make sure any corrective work is completed.

We also maintain specialist equipment and test specialist equipment that we provide at schemes.

It is all about keeping you safe and giving you a peace of mind. When an appointment is made, please keep it and provide access. However, if something does come up and you can't make it, let us know as soon as possible.

Customer Scrutiny Conference 2024



Thank you to those that attended the Customer Scrutiny Conference on 12 September 2024. The conference took place at the Black Country Living Museum and the purpose was to hear your voice on three areas for improvement that customers told us we need to improve. We called the conference, 'Your Voice, Your Approval.'

What happened?

We had the keynote speaker from the Housing Ombudsman Service, Sarah Woolley, Head of Dispute Resolution, explaining what the service offers and learning from complaints. Our Chief Executive, Amanda Tomlinson gave an update on how Board are hearing the customer voice including them being at the conference.

BCHG colleagues working together with the Resident Scrutiny Voice Panel (RSVP), hosted 9 tables that also had a member of Board to observe and listen. There were three themes introduced based on the customer feedback during the year:

1. Complaint Handling
2. Rules for repairs operative when working in your home.
3. Gas contractor



What customers told us:

1. Complaint Handling

- Do everything you can to make things right first, if you cannot then deal with the dissatisfaction as a complaint.
- Timing and tone of communication is important.

2. Rules for repair operatives

- Show your ID badge so we know who you are.
- Wear shoe covers in our home.
- Communicate clearly what work is being done.

3. Gas contractor

- Service can be good for some and poor for others.
- Attitude of call centre is below what is expected.
- BCHG should deliver the gas through their Homeforce Team

What happens next?

A report co-authored by the RSVP went to the Executive Team with recommendations from the conference and it has been approved. The Board also approved that gas servicing is brought in-house.

RSVP will now be monitoring the plan and holding BCHG to account. We will be updating our progress through 'You Said, We're Doing or We Did' in April 2025. View some of our previous commitments here:

<https://www.bchg.co.uk/feedback/comments-or-complaints/you-said-what-we-did/>



Supported Living

Apart from being a landlord BCHG operate a supported living project which oversees 5 schemes with 10 properties within the Dudley and Sandwell boroughs.

Supported living offers tenants with physical, learning disabilities and autism to maintain their tenancies and have their own homes with the support of staff, promoting independence and inclusion within local communities.

We currently support 18 tenants to live fulfilled and meaningful lives, helping with everyday living, finances and budgets, mobility, independence and maintaining social contacts.

Recent engagement surveys from our tenants were positive with 100% saying that they felt safe in their homes, that staff listen to them and that they are treated with respect.

BCHG ensures that all of its tenants are treated equally and supported living tenants are given the opportunity to join customer conferences, customer engagement initiatives and the broadcast.

Opportunities to Have Your Say

There are more opportunities for you to have your say, please view our current customer voice menu of involvement:

<https://www.bchg.co.uk/media/4rjbl2jg/customer-voice-involvement-panels.pdf>

We use IFF Housing Research to carry out our Tenant Satisfaction Measures. It is a good way of letting us know what you think. They contact by telephone and by email. You can find more detail about IFF and what they do here:

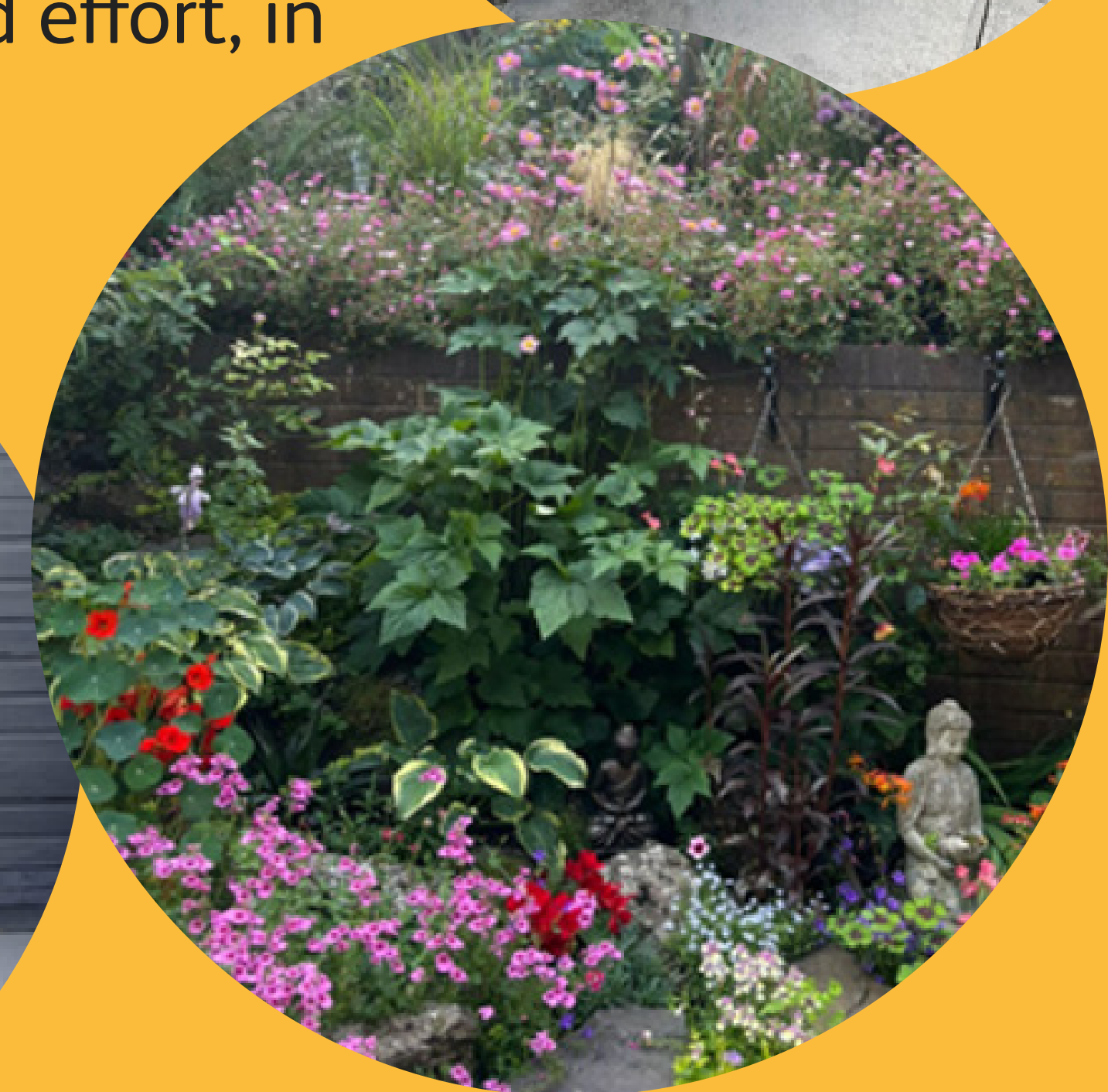
<https://www.bchg.co.uk/about-us/customer-voice/get-involved/working-with-iff-research-to-learn-more-about-you/>

Blooming Marvellous

RSVP ran the garden competition and judged the final few entries on 30 July 2024. Here are the winning entries who received a voucher:

- Best Garden - First and Second Places
- Best Communal Garden
- Best Pots

All entrants received a thank you voucher. A special thank you to RSVP for their hard work and effort, in making it Blooming Marvellous!



Making Things Right

As you would have read earlier, if you have an issue or concern with BCHG please let us know. We want to make things right. There are number of ways to let us know:

Contact points:

- Telephone - 0121 561 1969
- Email us by filling out this form - <https://www.bchg.co.uk/feedback/comments-or-complaints/>
- Follow us on social media:
 - Facebook - Black Country Housing Group
 - Instagram - @blackcounryhousinggroup
- Website - www.bchg.co.uk

Additional information

- Housing Ombudsman Service:
<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/bring-your-complaint-to-the-housing-ombudsman/>

What did you think of this edition of Customer Broadcast – let us know and rate us at BCHG Chat here:
<https://www.bchg.co.uk/feedback/bchg-chat/>

