

# NEWS



**Solihull**  
Community Housing  
Shaping our neighbourhoods

For tenants and leaseholders of Solihull Community Housing

Winter 2019



**Christmas  
Prize draw**

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Cut out and  
keep rent  
calendar inside!



# Chair's Christmas Message

**Welcome to the special festive edition of your Winter newsletter. It's packed with important news and useful features which I hope you find interesting.**

You will see on the opposite page we're launching our Winter Rent campaign. Every year we have a host of lucky winners, winning cash prizes in time to help with the Christmas shopping. If your rent account is up to date you will automatically be entered into our two prize draws. Having a clear rent account will also mean you can enjoy a Rent Free Week.

Rent payments are what enable us to maintain your home and carry out any repairs you may have. In the last few weeks we have launched our new 'My SCH Account' portal which enables you to report repairs online quickly.

If you haven't registered yet then why not make it your New Year resolution to do so – or better still, register before Christmas. It's a great way to keep tabs on your account.

We are very keen to raise engagement levels with residents. To help us achieve this we have recently become members of the tenant support organisation TPAS.

We want to hear your views about us and the services we provide. Your feedback helps us to deliver the best possible service we can.

Like me you may have been watching the coverage of the report into the fire at Grenfell Tower. As with all housing landlords – and in particular those like SCH who manage high rise buildings – we will be noting the findings carefully. The safety of all our tenants is our No.1 priority and in 2020 we will continue to deliver key fire safety messages to all our customers.



**Richard Hyde**  
Board Chair

Finally, on behalf of the whole SCH Board, I would like to wish all our tenants and leaseholders a very Merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year.

## Christmas hours

**Our offices will be closed from:**

- 25 – 27 December 2019
- 31 December 2019 – 1 January 2020

**For emergencies please call 0121 717 1515.**



## Our new online service

**We recently celebrated Get Online Week by launching our new online service, My SCH Account.**



During the week we visited several of our offices including Solihull Connect and our Payments Office. We enjoyed meeting tenants who were interested in learning more about My SCH Account.

My SCH Account is available for all of our tenants and leaseholders. It makes it easy for you to access our services 24/7, whenever and wherever is best for you.



The online service will allow you to:

- Report and check a repair
- Book/cancel a repair appointment
- View your rent account details
- See a breakdown of your current charges
- See your rent statement
- Make a payment



Have you signed up yet?



**■ To sign up to My SCH Account please visit our website and click on 'My SCH Account'.**



# Festive treats for you

We understand that Christmas can be an expensive time of year for most people. Prioritising your money and managing your spending is essential.



Don't let the pressures of Christmas distract you from your priority bills. Please make sure you pay your rent first.

Keeping your rent account up to date could see you win one of our great festive prize draws. To be in with the chance of winning all you need is a clear rent account! And if you pay your rent by Direct Debit then you are automatically entered into the draw.

If you are having difficulty paying your rent, please let us know. We have dedicated staff on hand all year round to help you.



## Christmas Prize Draw

If you have a clear rent account on 15 December you could be in with a chance of winning one of four £250 cash prizes.

## Rent Free Week

If you have a clear rent account on 22 December you can enjoy a rent free week from 23 December.

## Quarterly Prize Draw

If you have a clear rent account on 5 January you could be the winner of our £200 prize draw.





# Building Futures is working to help you

**Wates have staged a successful two-week scheme in Chelmsley Wood offering local people help with training and employment.**

The Building Futures Course was delivered by Solihull-based Skills Funding Agency, Ixion. They set up home at Maple Walk in the heart of the town centre, offering opportunities to people currently not in education, employment or training.

In November, 17 candidates – including a number of SCH tenants – signed up for a two-week introductory course. At the end of the course each student was awarded a CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) and BTEC Level 1 in Construction.

During the course, funded by Wates Living Space, students were introduced to such things as plumbing, carpentry and brick-laying.

Local sub-contractors and employers also got behind the new scheme offering support around job interviews.

Two of the students have already secured permanent full-time positions with one of our own contractors, Wates Living Space.



Jackie from SCH, with Claudette and Jean from Wates Living Space



**Jan Jackson**  
Chair of the Scrutiny Panel

**Hi everyone,**

I would like to begin by wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Scrutiny have been involved with the Customer Journey Mapping Exercise where we are looking at how SCH deliver services to customers. We have been looking at customer journeys and making recommendations. Here are some examples:

**Boiler faults** – a customer reported a fault with their boiler and SCH arranged an appointment to investigate. The outcome was that the boiler could not be repaired and would need replacing. Based on the customers experience we recommend the following:

- SCH should keep tenants well informed and updated
- SCH should explain what the issue is and how they plan to resolve it
- Tenants should understand that SCH must investigate the fault before they can replace the boiler and boilers cannot be replaced after one visit

**Asbestos testing** – a tenant required an asbestos check to their home. Scrutiny monitored the process to identify areas of improvement. We recommended:

- Better communication between SCH staff and contractors
- Processes should be clearly explained to tenants
- Tenants must be kept informed and updated

**Information given to new tenants** – A new tenant moved into a high rise property and had problems with their heating system. We monitored their experience and made the following recommendations:

- SCH should show new tenants how use the heating system when they view the property and leave them with instructions
- SCH should test the heating system before signing the property over to the new tenant

Scrutiny will continue to monitor customer journeys and I look forward to sharing more findings with you.

■ If you have any comments for us please get in touch. Email us at [newsandviews@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:newsandviews@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk) or call **0121 717 1515**.

# Don't be a Christmas turkey! Bin your festive rubbish

**As we approach the festive season we find that most of us have more rubbish than usual.**

Everything from chocolate wrappers to Christmas crackers leaves us with unwanted paper and packaging that is destined for the bin.

It's important that any rubbish you generate is disposed of correctly.

It is vital that you do not leave any type of rubbish, including black bags and bulky items, on communal landings, stairwells, in chute rooms or outside the block.

Please ensure you put black bags down the bin chute but remember do not overfill the bags because this will block the chute.

If rubbish is not disposed of correctly it can be a health and safety risk. It can also be a fire risk so we need your help to reduce it.

Let's work together to keep you and your neighbours safe. Please make sure you follow the correct waste removal procedure.

As you can see from our photos, we have a major problem with Christmas rubbish. Please help us to avoid that happening again this year.

Refuse collections for the high rises over Christmas and New Year will be on:

- **Monday 23 December**
- **Tuesday 24 December**
- **Friday 27 December**
- **Monday 30 December**
- **Thursday 2 January**
- **Friday 3 January**

Normal service will resume from Monday 6 January 2020.

We will be working with our block cleaners Wettons to remove excess



rubbish as quickly as possible over the festive period.

There has been a number of bogus refuse collectors reported to us.

Never pay a stranger to take rubbish from your home as this will probably be fly-tipped.

If you have bulky items that you need to remove please ask for our Bulky Waste

Collection service on 0121 717 1515.

We will be working hard with Solihull Council to keep the streets tidy over Christmas but please help us by playing your part too.

Help us keep you and your neighbours safe and the environment tidy. Please dispose of your rubbish responsibly.








# Rent Calendar 2020/21

This is your rent calendar for 2020/21. Please pin it up as a reminder or keep it somewhere safe. It shows all the days on which your rent is due. We will write to you in March with details of your 2020/21 charges. If you claim Housing Benefit then you will also receive a letter from Solihull Council, explaining your entitlement for 2020/21. These two letters will tell you what you will need to pay.

**Your rent is due weekly but if you prefer to pay fortnightly then you should pay on the weeks in blue.**

Week No.	Date	Payment Made	Week No.	Date	Payment Made
1	April 6		27	Oct 5	
2	April 13		28	Oct 12	
3	April 20		29	Oct 19	
4	April 27		30	Oct 26	
5	May 4		31	Nov 2	
6	May 11		32	Nov 9	
7	May 18		33	Nov 16	
8	May 25		34	Nov 23	
9	June 1		35	Nov 30	
10	June 8		36	Dec 7	
11	June 15		 37	Dec 14	
12	June 22		38	Dec 21	No rent due unless in arrears
13	June 29		39	Dec 28	
14	July 6		40	Jan 4	
15	July 13		41	Jan 11	
16	July 20		42	Jan 18	
17	July 27		43	Jan 25	
18	Aug 3		44	Feb 1	
19	Aug 10		45	Feb 8	
20	Aug 17		46	Feb 15	
21	Aug 24		47	Feb 22	
22	Aug 31		48	Mar 1	
23	Sep 7		49	Mar 8	
24	Sep 14		50	Mar 15	
25	Sep 21		51	Mar 22	
26	Sep 28		52	Mar 29	No rent due unless in arrears
			53	April 5	

 £200 prize draw  4 x £250 Christmas draw winners

You will be automatically entered into our prize draws if you have a clear rent account at that time.

# We're listening to your feedback

Over the last couple of years you have been telling us what is important to you and what your priorities are. You may have attended an event, completed a survey, or 'Joined the Conversation' with us during the summer. However you fed back to us, you were all very clear about your expectations of us.



You told us:

- We should be more than 'bricks and mortar' – our tenancy and neighbourhood services should be accessible and improve lives.
- We should be creating homes for the future to meet your needs and the needs of our communities.
- We should be working in partnership to strengthen our communities to make sure they thrive.
- We should provide excellent customer service and improve what we do through your feedback.

- We should have well motivated staff who are empowered to deliver the services you want.

In order to meet your expectations we have been working on a new Vision for the organisation. To help us with this we would like to know:

- Have we captured the right information?
- Do they reflect your priorities?

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to delivering great services to residents and the wider community.

Becci Youlden, our new Customer

Experience and Localities Manager, said: "We want to make sure we are listening to you and acting upon your feedback. Your views and priorities will help shape the way we deliver services to you. "In future we will provide a wider range of opportunities for you to influence our future policies."

## ■ We'd love to know your thoughts!

Email [engagement@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:engagement@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk) or visit [www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](http://www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk) and click on **Share Your Views to complete a short survey**. Keep an eye out for our social media polls to have your say.

## Small Change, Big Impact

**Our Wellbeing team recently joined forces with Solihull Council's Occupational Therapists and the Solihull Community Falls team to celebrate Occupational Therapy Week.**

This year's theme was 'Small Change, Big Impact' which celebrates the impact Occupational Therapy (OT) has on people's lives.

The teams worked together over the week to raise awareness of the OT services available to residents of Solihull. Their focus was to inform people about how a small change could bring a big impact to their life.

The team visited local leisure centres and libraries across the borough to give advice on how to reduce the risk of falls around home and also take referrals for further assessments.

Thank you to everyone who popped by to see us!



### Top tips to reduce falls:

- Strengthen muscles and improve balance – this is one of the simplest things you can do to help prevent falls. Local exercise classes are available across Solihull, call



the Solihull Active Team on 0121 704 8207 for more information.

- Have regular eye tests – this helps make sure your vision is always at its best.
- Keep rooms and hallways well lit – poor lighting is often the cause of trips in the home.
- Avoid wearing shoes or slippers that don't fit – whilst they may be comfy they can increase the risk of trips and falls.
- Fix down rugs – rugs can be a trip hazard if they are not fixed down.



# Be sure to keep all your data safe

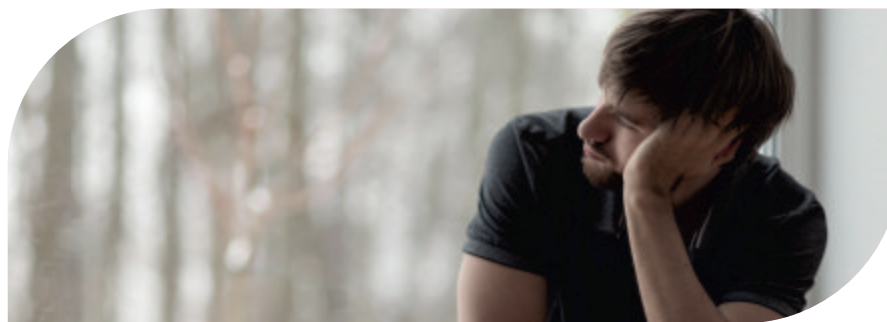
If you would like to give a trusted person permission to speak on your behalf about your tenancy, you will need to give us written permission. The permission you provide us will last for 12 months only.

If after 12 months you would like the same person or someone new to speak on your behalf you will need to renew your permission by writing to us.

This is to keep your personal information safe and secure.



# Speak up about criminals in your area



## Criminal gangs are exploiting vulnerable people in your area and we need your help to stop this.

These gangs are making vulnerable people suffer by taking over their homes.

Often their homes are used to deal drugs or commit other serious crimes. This is known as 'cuckooing'.

Everyone has the right to feel safe from crime and we want to help keep your communities safe.

■ You can report concerns of 'cuckooing' confidentially by calling our ASB hotline on 0121 717 1500 and calling the Police on 101.

You have the power to speak up and help protect those people who need help.

Signs of 'cuckooing' are:

- Lots of people visiting during the day and night
- An increase in cars or bikes outside
- An increase in antisocial behaviour
- Curtains or blind closed all the time
- Signs of drugs use

# Garden awards on the way back!



We are pleased to announce that the SCH Gardening Competition will be returning next year!

The competition will take place next Summer and we are looking forward to seeing some of the beautiful gardens around Solihull.

Look out for further details about how you can enter in the Spring newsletter.



# Keep Warm, Keep Well

We are working together to help keep you warm this winter. We can give you advice, tips and practical help on keeping warm and making your home more energy efficient.

For advice and support ring our Solihull Winter Warmth Helpline on:

**0121 704 8080**

Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm



# Your experience matters

**Have you ever felt let down, frustrated or disappointed by our service? We would like to work with you to improve things.**

Please let us know if you ever feel this way. You can discuss your experience with us by:

- calling **0121 717 1515**
- emailing **info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk**
- messaging us on our Facebook and Twitter sites

We will try to solve your issue at the first point of contact. If we can't, we'll make sure the right team will work with you to get the best possible outcome.

Your views will help us identify areas where we can make our services more customer-friendly.

We want to hear from you so we can help shape and improve our services for you and other residents.

We still have a formal Complaints Policy. We have recently reviewed this with a number of residents.

If you need to make a complaint we will be able to deal with it much more effectively.

■ **Our new Complaints Policy will be published on our website in the New Year.**

## Winter warmers

**We're all feeling the cold a little at this time of year. So here are a few simple tips to help keep you warm throughout Winter.**

### Heating

Try and heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F). You may prefer your main living room to be slightly warmer.

### Windows

Keep your bedroom window closed at night. Breathing in cold air can increase the risk of chest infections.

### Flu jab

If you are aged 65 or over or are the main carer for an older or disabled person, contact your GP to get your free flu jab. Visit [www.nhs.uk/flu](http://www.nhs.uk/flu) to learn more.

### Health

Don't delay in getting treatment for minor ailments like colds or sore throats. Visit your local pharmacist for advice before it gets worse so you can recover quicker.

### Clothing

Layer your clothing whether you are indoors or outside. Wrap a scarf around your mouth to protect your lungs from the cold air. Wear shoes with a good grip when outside.

### Mobility

When you are indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour or so. Get up, stretch your legs and make yourself a warm drink.

### Bedtime

Prepare a hot water bottle and put it in the bed before you turn in. Then the bed will be warm when you get in.

■ **For more help and advice to stay warm and well over the Winter please visit <https://solihull.mylifeportal.co.uk/winterwarmth/>**



**A free tenant matching service for private landlords**

#### Benefits of using Solihome:

- No fees
- One months rent in advance
- Deposit Bond equivalent up to five weeks rent
- Up to £150 contribution towards Landlords insurance
- In tenancy support and advice for landlords
- Affordability checks completed with tenants
- A wide range of support to help tenants manage and maintain their tenancy
- Free Inventory Service
- Single point of contact for landlords



To find out more about the scheme contact Paul Winwood on 0121 779 8876 or email [paulwinwood@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:paulwinwood@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)





# We'll be keeping you well informed

**We are keen to work closely with our customers to deliver services to the standard that you expect.**

**We have carried out a review into the way we handle your enquiries and feel that we can do more to support you.**

**So in the New Year you will hopefully see some changes to the way in which we operate.**

**We plan to respond more quickly to your calls and enquiries and keep you better informed at all times.**

**Earlier this month we held a special #KeepCustomers InformedWeek in which our staff went the extra mile to call customers back and update them on enquiries.**

**We know it can be annoying if a repair can't be done straightaway. So in the New Year we'll be raising our game to try and get things right first time around.**

**We want to hear your opinions so please share your views with us. Tell us where we can improve but also what we're doing well!**

**We'll be doing much more of this in the New Year with messages and updates for tenants in this newsletter, across our social media channels and on our new-look website.**

# Communities are at the heart of Locality Working

**You may be familiar with the well-known catchphrase... A problem shared is a problem solved.**

In many ways that captures the spirit of the Locality Working programme that has been introduced across Solihull over the past 18 months.

This multi-agency approach sees colleagues from a range of different organisations come together in specific areas to try and help communities and overcome any issues they may have.



Locality Working partners pictured during a recent community event in Smith's Wood

SCH are pleased to join forces with colleagues from the council, police, fire service, health groups and local grassroots organisations to help solve issues affecting residents in specific areas.

Locality Working supports the specific needs of residents in the North, West or East of the borough by bringing together everyone involved within that community.

A brilliant example of this is the current Solihull Safe Well and Warm campaign. You may see us out and about in your street with temporary heaters, timer switches, smoke detectors and tons of excellent tips and guidance.

In November we held successful events in each of the three areas to increase the awareness among community groups.

■ If you are involved in any activity, have any suggestions or want more information it would be great to hear from you! Please send an email to [localityworking@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:localityworking@solihull.gov.uk)

# Hermitage on parade to mark Armistice Day

**This year marks 101 years since the end of the First World War.**

Armistice Day was commemorated across the UK and we were proud to join some of our residents who live at the historic Hermitage in Solihull to mark the occasion.

The Hermitage is a landmark Solihull building and it was actually used as a military hospital during the war.

The Armed Forces charity SSAFA has an office in the building, and they were able to join us for the two minutes silence.

SSAFA also sold some of their charity Christmas cards to residents and with our engagement team supplying tea and cake it was a special occasion enjoyed by everyone present.





# Keeping your home free from mould

Occasionally you may have damp in your home. To help keep your home free from mould, follow these three steps:

## 1. Reduce the amount of moisture

- Dry your clothes outside when possible
- Use a clothes airer in the bathroom or kitchen with the door closed and the window slightly open or the extractor fan on
- Make sure tumble dryers are vented to the outside using the correct vent and fittings, not inside the home
- Don't use paraffin or liquid petroleum (bottled) gas heaters - they produce large amounts of water vapour and they're very expensive to run

## 2. Ventilate rooms

- When you cook, open a window or use the extractor fan and shut the door to prevent moisture from spreading to other parts of the house



- Open bedroom windows for a bit when you get up in the morning – remember to shut them before you go out
- Leave space between furniture and cold walls
- Avoid filling wardrobes and cupboards
- Don't block chimneys, flues or airbricks

## 3. Heat your home a little more

- Keep your heating on low all day rather than short bursts of high heat.

# Olton couple now have warm glow!

**Solihull residents are being given the chance to have a gas central heating boiler and radiators installed for free, as part of a scheme provided by the National Grid Warm Homes Fund.**

David and Joyce Westwood from Olton had a boiler and nine radiators installed in their three bedroom semi last November.

Joyce said: "The men arrived at 8am and we went out for the day. We got back at 7pm and the house was warm, clean and tidy."

David added: "For the first time ever, we can walk from room to room and stay warm. Before the installation we

were paying over £1,000 a year on coal so we're making a substantial saving. We didn't even need to pay for the new gas supply to the house. It really is something for nothing."

You could be next! If you don't have gas central heating, you could be eligible for a free boiler and radiators.

The £150million Warm Homes Fund scheme is funded by National Grid. A team from Act On Energy carry out the work free of charge at those homes who meet the criteria.

The scheme is only available to you if you live in a house, bungalow or low rise flat.

■ To find out if you are eligible, email [advice@actonenergy.org.uk](mailto:advice@actonenergy.org.uk) or call the Freephone number 0800 988 2881.



**Burst pipes are common during the winter months. Cold temperatures can cause pipes to freeze or burst due to water expanding when it is frozen. To help prevent ice blockages or freezing pipes please follow these simple steps:**

- Have your central heating system checked and serviced regularly.
- Check all your taps from time to time. If little or no water flows there may be frozen water in the pipes.
- Know where your stopcock is in case you need to cut off the flow of water if a pipe starts leaking.
- If you have plans to go away leave the central heating on and set your thermostat to low to prevent freezing.
- Ask a friend, neighbour or relative to check your home while you are away. This will make sure burst pipes are spotted early.
- Turn off any indoor valves on pipes that lead to outdoor taps. Once you have done this turn on your outside tap to drain it of any water. This will make sure no water is left in the pipes to freeze.





# Star Photo Competition

**Thank you to everyone who entered and sent us pictures that capture Solihull at its very best.**

Congratulations to our winner, Noel Jackson from Smith's Wood on the lovely picture of Babbs Mill Lake in Solihull. Your £25 voucher is in the post!

If you would like your picture in the next issue of the newsletter please enter. We're after some great images that show what a wonderful place Solihull is to live.

The photos can be taken with a camera or phone and can be taken anywhere in Solihull. Only one picture per person is allowed. Only SCH tenants and leaseholders can enter.

**WIN**  
**A £25 GIFT**  
**VOUCHER**



■ Please email your photos to [info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)  
The closing date is Friday 24 January 2020.

## To get in touch

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