

Housing News

Information Bulletin from Wigan and Leigh Housing

No. 44, April 2006

Peter Gee hands over to Ashley Crumbley

Ashley Crumbley, currently Wigan Council's deputy director of community protection, will take over from retiring chief executive Peter Gee at the end of June.



For most of his 30-year local government career Ashley has been involved in housing. He joined Wigan Council in 1995 and is the architect of the borough's housing

strategy, which has seen the number of unfit and poorly insulated homes fall dramatically over the last 10 years.

He played a major role in the council's top 3 star rating from government inspectors for its private sector housing services, and helped the Metro win Beacon

Council status on two separate occasions.

Ashley, who grew up on a Council housing estate, said: "I am absolutely delighted to be able to serve the borough in this role. In its first four years Wigan and Leigh Housing has transformed the quality of the council's housing, and Peter Gee will be a hard act to follow.

"The organisation has been independently assessed by government inspectors as providing a good service. I am really looking forward to working with Wigan and Leigh Housing's boards, tenants, leaseholders and staff to build on its strengths and to provide even better housing services. I am also looking forward to working closely with Wigan and Leigh's partners particularly at both estate and township levels".

Contact: Karen Nolan - ☎ 01942 486599

Advice surgery first

Tenants on the Higher Folds estate in Leigh are going back to school ... to sort out their housing problems! We have recently set up a new advice surgery that is held every Friday between 9.15am and 2.30pm at Higher Folds Primary School. The Primary School is situated right next to the estate and the head teacher was delighted to make the facility available to local tenants. They can drop in and discuss their rent account, housing benefit, estate management, welfare rights concerns and general housing enquiries.

The drop-in centre is the first of its kind in the borough. It is part of our plans to make our housing services more convenient and accessible to our customers. We hope to be able to set up similar surgeries in other parts of the borough in the future.

Contact: Dave Bainbridge - ☎ 01942 767340

A knotty problem

There are certain species of plants which are creating problems for local authorities throughout the country. By far the biggest concern is the rapid spread of Japanese Knotweed.



Japanese Knotweed was introduced to the UK in the mid nineteenth century as an ornamental plant. Since then it has become a

serious problem on roadsides, railway embankments, riverbanks and derelict land. It displaces the native flora and can cause structural damage. It is illegal to spread Japanese Knotweed.

Officers of Wigan and Leigh Housing have been dealing with Knotweed in various ways. Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust can treat Japanese Knotweed but, unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to eradicate and more than one treatment may be required. The treatment is long term and it can take two to three years to completely kill the entire plant. Clearly such a long-term solution requires careful management as missed treatment could lead to the plant growing again. There is also the problem that this form of spraying does not provide any guarantee that the growth will not return.

Area Housing Managers make a record of any incidence of Knotweed, or any other Invasive Species using an 'Invasive Species Recording Form'.

The company is shortly to trial an alternative spray treatment that has a 4 year guarantee to show that the plant has been completely eradicated. The treatment is expensive but the investment will be worthwhile if it can prevent the spread of this "knotty" problem. It will take some time for us to test out the success or otherwise of the new treatment but the prospects look promising.

Contact: Jeff Prescott - ☎ 01942 486511

Tenants spring into action



Tenants around the borough are grabbing their gardening gloves, sharpening their shears and digging out their trowels as the search is on for the best garden in the borough.

Our popular gardening competition is now in its fourth year and there are four categories to be judged in this year's competition:

1. Best overall garden
2. Best private garden
3. Recognition award (including hanging baskets, communal gardens and most improved garden)
4. Best young gardener (aged 16 and under).

Local prizes will go to the top three in each section, with first place winners going forward to the borough-wide finals and the chance to win yet more prizes, including vouchers and the overall winner's trophy in each category.

Council tenants are being sent an entry form with their quarterly rent statement and forms are also available from any area housing office or online at www.walh.co.uk

The closing date for entries is Monday 19th June.

Contact: - Patsy Murray ☎ 01942 705702

Joint Consultative Council established

The first meeting of the Wigan and Leigh Housing Joint Consultative Council (JCC) took place on 3rd April. The JCC has been set up to enable employees to get more involved in discussions and negotiations on employment and wider issues affecting the future of the business.

The JCC will promote a spirit of partnership and joint working between management and trade unions. It is made up of:

- Wigan and Leigh Housing Shop Stewards
- Convenors from the GMB and Unison trade unions
- An employee representative from each of the six directorates
- Two management representatives - initially the Chief Executive and Human Resources Manager

A constitution and terms of reference has been drafted and agreed. There has been an encouraging response from staff who have volunteered to represent their directorates.

Employee representatives will carry out the following functions:

- act as a voice for the views and concerns of colleagues
- help with the development of new employment policies and procedures
- help make sure WALH's wider employee communication and

- consultation processes are effective
- monitor and review the Company's performance on employment issues

Senior trade union representatives will lead the employee side in any local negotiations with management but employee representatives, who do not have to be a member of a trade union will work alongside the trade unions in any negotiations. Employee representatives.

JCC meetings will be held every 6 weeks and proposals from the JCC will be submitted to the company's Human Resources Committee.

Contact: - Karen Nolan ☎ 01942 486599

Changes to the emergency repairs service

Wigan and Leigh Housing has recently taken over the management of the out of hours emergency repairs service from the Council's Community Protection Department. Council tenants ringing out of hours on either the Contact Centre number or the emergency repairs number are now diverted to staff at Wigan Area Housing Office. As part of the process three members of staff previously employed in the Central Watch Team have joined the company and are settling in well to their new roles.

Staff have been trained to directly input the repair on to our computer system and can make appointments if necessary. We have also put an additional resource in to cover the early evening hours when most emergency calls come through. A

standby rota of managers is also on hand to offer expert advice. Overall we think that the new arrangements offer a better service to customers.

Contact: - Tony Gerrard ☎ 01942 486509

Tenant satisfaction test

Our 23,500 council tenants will soon receive our tri-annual tenant satisfaction survey. The comprehensive survey provides the company with important information about our tenants and their views on issues that affect them. It is set out in a designated format approved by the government that enables local authorities and housing organisations to compare their tenant satisfaction with that of other similar housing providers.

Tenants are able to give their opinions about their homes, their estates, how we communicate with them, the repairs service, their opportunities to get involved in the housing service and other important issues.

The survey will be issued an independent electoral organisation that will collate the results and report back to the company. A money prize draw entry will be offered as an incentive to tenants to complete and return the survey.

Contact: - Vicky Bannister ☎ 01942 486534

***Paying rent now easier than
ever***



Direct Debit
is the
easiest way
to pay rent -

and it's getting easier!

Council tenants who have a bank account are encouraged to use Direct Debit to spread their rent payments over 12 equal monthly installments. We've recently added two more dates in the month when tenants can choose to pay.

They can now choose to pay on either 5th, 14th, 21st or 28th of each month - whatever best suits their budget.

Tenants need to complete a Direct Debit form and we will do the rest. We send a letter telling the tenant the dates when the rent will be collected from their bank account and the amount due on each date. Tenants can contact our Direct Debit helpline on 01942 486630 or 486631 and can also download the form from our website at www.walh.co.uk

Contact: - Malcolm Barton ☎ 01942
486620