

# InTouch

Issue 52 Autumn 2022



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# WELCOME

I hope you managed to enjoy the unusually hot summer in Plymouth. As we prepare for the colder months ahead, we appreciate many people may be feeling anxious about the rise in the cost of living, and especially energy bills.

In this edition, we have compiled some helpful information about ways to help manage rising costs, and organisations which may be able to offer support.

On a more positive note, there are still many employment, training and educational opportunities out there.

We have the latest from the Skills Launchpad, looking at some of the many opportunities for adults to obtain numeracy skills and qualifications.

Our Plymspirational interview is with an amazing young woman. Roza Kurdo arrived in the city as a child refugee, now she's a medical professional and hoping to represent England in the Miss World competition.

We look at the handywork of one of our Rangers, who decided to use his imagination when removing a tree that had grown too big for a garden.

You can read about how children were thrilled when our Re-use Centre delivered lots for free toys to The Beacon. We meet a new Board member and learn about how seriously we take your complaints, and what we learn from them.

And we report on one of our community gardens which has benefited from a helping hand from a local contractor.

Finally, I wanted to add that this will be my final In Touch introduction letter as I complete my term as Chair. I know people always say "it has been a great privilege to . . ." but it really has been a great privilege for me to Chair PCH.

Overall the organisation does a brilliant job and I am confident PCH is one of the best housing associations. We may not always get it right first time, but the PCH values of 'Care, listen, respect, and do the right thing' shine through.

Not only has it been a privilege to Chair PCH, but it has also been a very easy job given the support from Board Members, particularly Committee Chairs and the Vice Chair, the Chief Exec, all the staff and every single tenant I have met.



Nick

Nick Lewis, Chair of the Board



## FORMER RUBBISH DUMP FLOURISHES INTO COMMUNITY GARDEN

A community garden in Stoke is going from strength to strength as volunteers welcomed the donation of a shed and its foundations last month.

A large shipment of sand and cement provided by Gilpin Environmental was delivered to Wingfield Road Community Garden.

The materials were provided free of charge by the PCH contractor and will form the base of a new shed for the gardening group to store tools.

Ryan Huws tried his hand at air traffic control as the cement was craned into place.

Volunteers at the site eagerly awaited the delivery which will ensure the community group continues to thrive.

The site was formerly part of an old rubbish dump before the Second World War. Volunteers spent hours clearing the overgrown area and even discovered old chocolate wrappers from the 1970s buried in the soil.

One visitor who was buzzing to be there was given a helping hand by a quick-thinking gardener. A tired

bumblebee was given a drink of sugary water which a green fingered volunteer kept on her at all times.

Communities Worker Ryan Huws said:

**"Our door is always open to anyone wanting to come along. You don't need to be an expert but you can expect to learn a thing or two about plant species from our passionate regulars."**





## AROUND THE HOUSES WITH THE PCH BOARD

Our Board members embarked on a tour across Plymouth during the summer, visiting a mix of new-build sites and existing PCH homes.

The tour was a great way for both new and existing Board members to view the properties across the city and gain a deeper understanding of the work that PCH is doing to support the people of Plymouth.

The tour started at The Beacon, the community hub in the heart of North Prospect, and was led by Ian Frazer, PCH's Head of Asset Management, and Andrew Lawrie, Head of Development.

The first stop was Silver Hill on Tamerton Foliot Road in Crownhill, which is a joint venture between Plymouth Community Homes Regeneration Company and Halsall Homes.

The development will deliver 38 homes including 27 for private sale, six for shared ownership and five for affordable rent. Members of the Board were able to visit homes that are still under development in various stages as well tour two homes which have been completed.

From here a coach took the Board across Plymouth, driving past many housing schemes including the Passivhaus development in Whiteleigh, an innovative development designed to be carbon-neutral.

The next stop was Morley Court on Western Approach in the city centre, where all members could look at the new art replica of Smeaton's Tower and explore the surrounding area.

The tour also visited the West End area of the city centre, including New George Street and Cornwall

Street, Market Avenue, Frankfort Gate and Raleigh Street.

At the end of the tour, the coach made its way back to The Beacon where Board members visited the roof terrace to take in the views across North Prospect and Plymouth.

Maja Jorgensen, Board Member, said: "It's fantastic to come out and see the places that we manage as it is important for us to understand and see where people live, and to understand how we serve the communities that we look after.

"It is also great to see Plymouth Community Homes working on development and thinking about the new places and homes that are being provided.

"There is a lot to get our heads around as new Board members, so this is fantastic timing for me to get out and have a look around with fellow members of the Board and staff, to have a chance to get to know them better."



## INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER

Maja Jorgensen joined the PCH Board in May 2022.

Maja started her career as an urban designer and has since worked in the charity sector. There she worked to empower communities through design by giving them the skills to lead built environment change in their local area.

When working for the Mayor of London, she introduced the London Community Led Housing Hub and worked with housing associations and Government departments on new developments.

Maja moved to Devon in 2021 where she now works to embed innovation in the NHS and social care sectors to overcome health inequalities.

Maja said: "I have a diverse background from working across different sectors and am excited to be part of Plymouth Community Homes. I believe communities have a deep knowledge of their local area and that new housing developments and regeneration projects become better when they take the insights of local people into account."



## WE'RE RECRUITING

The Customer Focus Committee (CFC) exists to give residents a voice in how PCH works.

There are currently five vacancies, and we are looking for tenants, leaseholders and shared owners to join the CFC.

By joining the CFC as co-optees, you could support the Board by making sure PCH offers excellent services to all its residents.

If you are interested in joining the Committee and want to find out more, please visit the CFC dedicated webpage on our website or contact the Governance Team on **01752 388364** or [governance@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:governance@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)



# RESIDENT SCRUTINY UPDATE

Resident Scrutiny is one of the ways that PCH residents can get involved in the decisions we make about homes and neighbourhoods that have a real influence on the services we provide.

It's a formal process that the regulator for social housing requires all housing associations to go through. Residents choose a different topic for scrutiny every year which is guided by our Scrutiny Steering Group (SSG). The topic scrutinised this year was 'PCH contractors' interactions with residents.'

A small task-and finish-group of residents put themselves forward to lead the scrutiny. The group designed a survey for other residents, with more than 200 responding.

Residents spoke to key PCH staff who deliver the service and gathered survey responses.

A report was created with recommendations for improvement, highlighting areas of good practice. The group presented their report to PCH's Customer Focus Committee (Board) in August.

## What did the report tell us?

We could improve resident involvement before, during and after contract works take place in residents' homes.

- We could be clearer about PCH's values and expectations with our contractors
- We should hold poorly performing contractors to account

Most residents who responded are satisfied with the communication, quality of work, and that they know who to contact when having contract works done in their home.

Complaints are welcomed and seen as an opportunity to learn and put things right.

Building good relationships with contractors starts early, and some larger contract works include a dedicated Tenant Liaison Officer which helps with communication.

## What happens next

The scrutiny report is now with senior managers so that improvements can be worked on, and we'll be keeping the PCH Board and the resident Scrutiny Steering Group updated as we make progress.

## An update on last year's scrutiny recommendations

Last year's scrutiny looked at 'Getting hold of the right person at PCH' and the report recommended some ways we could improve.

As a result, PCH has:

- Put in place updated target response times in some areas, so residents get a quicker response to their complaint or their call.
- Expanded and increased the number of ways that residents can contact us, for example through social media platforms, a chat bot, and by providing language and BSL (British Sign Language) translations.
- Made better use of community events to keep residents informed now that Covid restrictions have ended.

# HEATING YOUR HOME SAFELY

If you are using electric mobile heaters in any parts of your home, it is important to do so safely.

Electric heaters can come with risks if not used properly.

Due to some mobile heaters - such as fan heaters - using a high amount of electricity over a short period of time, extra care must be taken when using them:

## Do not plug into an extension lead

Mobile heaters use a lot of power and can heat up quickly. Extension leads can become overloaded when powering mobile heaters. Use wall mounted plug sockets only.

## Keep out of reach of children

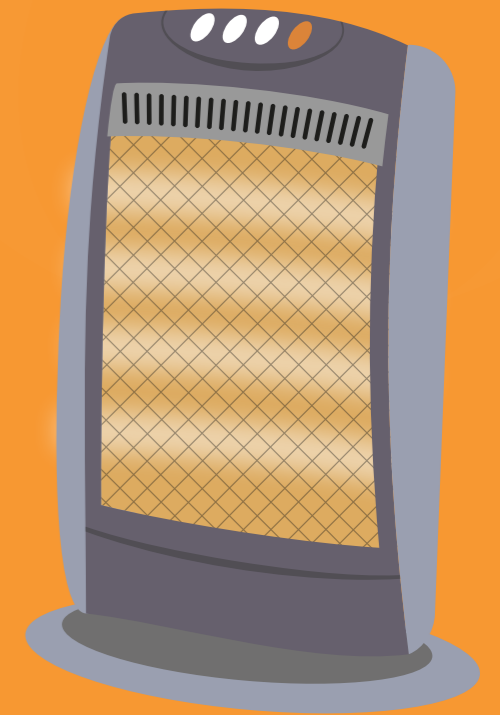
Mobile heaters falling over can cause house fires. Ensure fan heaters are out of reach of children or supervise at all times.

## Give it space

Furniture close by can become hot very quickly, give mobile heaters lots of space to heat the room and allow heat to spread throughout the home.

## Use for room heating only

Mobile electric heaters should be used to heat your home only, and never used to dry clothes or other items.



# COMPETITION WINNER!

We received lots of great entries to our photo competition for the best firework photo.

We asked PCH residents to 'snap a banger' at the British Firework Championships held in August.

After receiving lots of entries, we created a shortlist of the best photos we received. Residents could then vote on social media and via our monthly e-newsletter.

And the winner, who received a brand new iPad, was . . . Tiffany, who sent us the fantastic picture.

**Tiffany said: "I really didn't think I was going to win so I was very pleased to find out my photo won."**



# HELPING PLYMOUTH ADULTS ON THEIR LEARNING JOURNEYS

Skills Launchpad Plymouth, the city's one-stop-shop connecting local people with opportunities for skills, training, education, careers and jobs, works closely with key delivery partner On Course South West.

As Plymouth City Council's adult education service, On Course South West is on hand to help local people learn, whether they are developing existing skills through continued learning, setting out on a new learning journey or entering into the job market, supporting residents to upskill or re-train.

Launching this autumn, On Course South West course offer covers a variety of areas, including employability skills, digital skills, English and maths, e-learning and more. With a number of new initiatives starting in the coming months, there are courses that will benefit you and suit your personal needs.

## Want to brush up on your skills or learn something completely new?

On Course South West offers:

- Courses that are mostly FREE and extra learning and financial support is available for those eligible
- Small, friendly groups where everyone is aged 19 or above
- Learning that is flexible, rewarding and enjoyable
- The opportunity to develop confidence and skills as well as knowledge
- Learning journeys that are personalised to your needs
- Staff who are highly trained, well-qualified, enthusiastic and committed to your progress
- Progression opportunities which could support with employment, further study or new careers

whatever your personal circumstance may be, On Course South West will be supporting local people with essential skills that will help you in your daily life and wider employment goals.

Some of our courses to support this include cooking on a budget, mental health and well-being, money management and more.

## Thinking of going back to work?

There are a number of initiatives that can assist local people to upskill and boost their employability. SMART SKILLS and HSSAP offers, funded by the European Social Fund, include employability skills, digital skills, well-being and support for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as health and social care. The launch of national programme Multiply, will be able to assist local people improve their numeracy skills and their confidence surrounding numbers. The team of friendly learning advisors can help you with the start of your journey.

## How can On Course South West support you?

Nationally and locally here in Plymouth, the pandemic has already taken a huge toll with additional pressures going into this winter with the cost-of-living crisis. Many of us will be experiencing new difficulties, but



group, and despite being the oldest in both classes, I learnt so much from the other students.

"Thanks to the support I received, I passed both functional courses at Level 2 and the learning bug had well and truly been bitten. Since then I have progressed through the levels and am now starting an Access to Higher Education Course in English Literature and Creative Writing this September. None of this would have been possible without taking the first steps with the team at On Course South West."

## Don't take our word for it.... Meet Tony

Tony visited the Learning Hub on Mutley Plain after deciding to return to education after 50 years, enrolling on both functional English and Maths courses and progressing onto GCSE English. He worked with tutors Gill and Phil, who were able to make Tony's transition back into education as smooth as possible and assist where they can to help begin his learning journey with On Course South West.

Tony said: **"Stepping through the doors at Hyde Park House was a revelation; everyone from the advisors to the tutors put me at ease."**

"What I liked best was the relaxed classroom environment. It's not the same as a school classroom with the peer pressure of everyone in the same age



[www.oucoursesouthwest.co.uk](http://www.oucoursesouthwest.co.uk)

[info@oucoursesouthwest.co.uk](mailto:info@oucoursesouthwest.co.uk)

01752 660713



## HERE FOR YOU...

## GET YOUR LEARNING JOURNEY STARTED!

- Accounting
- Business
- Childcare
- Counselling
- Creative Skills
- Digital Skills
- Healthcare, Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Learn a Foreign Language
- Teaching Assistant Qualifications
- Employability
- English and maths
- Family Learning
- Science

Enrol Now for Online or Face to Face learning!

FIND OUT MORE



# REPLICA MODEL CANNOT BE MATCHED

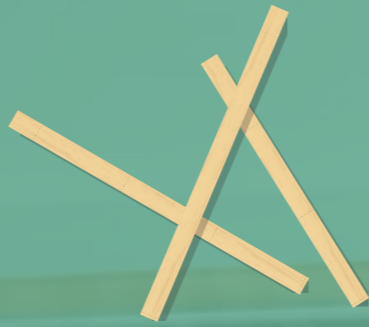
An incredible replica model of a church building in North Prospect has been completed after years of hard work by a local resident.

The model by Roy Williams took five years to complete, and will now be protected by a Perspex screen supplied by Plymouth Community Homes and installed by the specialist company, Fibre-Tech.

The model is a perfect replica of the Morice Baptist Church on Ham Drive.

Roy started the project with a couple of other members of the Crossroads Fun and Friendship group, held at the Morice Baptist church on the corner of Ham Drive.

The model was made using household items like matches and lollipop sticks. Roy was so committed to making the model as life-like as possible that he even included upgrades to the building as they happened.



Roy said: "It all started as a joint project for the members but one by one they all dropped off, so I decided to finish off the project myself."

"All the materials for the model were donated by various Crossroads members, including myself. The materials that were used on the model consisted of lots of matchsticks and lollipop sticks and the drainpipes were made from reusable straws. It has lots of glue and took a huge amount of patience, especially when changes were made at Morice Baptist Church - such as ramps and new fences."

Roy continued: "The garden was the biggest challenge; I sourced all the shrubs and flowers from the hobby shop. I really enjoyed making the model which was made as accurate as possible so more people can see it and hopefully appreciate the time and effort that went into making it."

Roy added that he was thrilled to know that the model will now be protected.

PCH Communities Worker, Karl Trevis, said: "For me being new to PCH, it was great to form a cross-department and contractor relationship. I was so impressed with the incredible patience and perseverance of Roy to spend years building the model."

"I want to thank Roy, Project Manager Len Russell and Tracey Archman. A massive thank you also goes out to Catherine, Darryn and Dave from Fibre Tech for all their wonderful work in preserving this model for years to come."



"We initially had an idea to do a small model...but it just grew and grew."





# Roza Kurdo

Roza Kurdo has come a long way since arriving in the country aged four.

Roza is of Kurdish ethnicity, and she fled Iraq with her mother in 2001. Kurdish peoples faced horrific persecution and ethnic cleansing in the country, and many Kurdish people within the different regions still face persecution and systemic oppression.

Roza arrived in Britain without speaking a word of English but moved to Plymouth with an intense desire to learn and create.

Today, as a qualified phlebotomist (a nurse specialising in blood), an artist, and aspiring author, she caught the attention of the famous Miss World competition for her resilience and achievements. As it turns out, the competition is “far more than standing around having your photo taken.”

Roza’s life is now a far cry from her childhood. When she arrived in Plymouth with her mum, her family were given refugee status. Although this was initially good news, being a refugee in an unfamiliar country came with challenges.

Although the family was allowed to stay in the UK, her mother’s refugee status meant she was unable to work. Planning for the future was impossible and this state of limbo lasted for seven years as the family’s application for UK citizenship was processed at a frustratingly slow pace.

“We didn’t have citizenship for seven years,” Roza said. “The life of asylum seekers is very tough: you can’t work, you can’t get a driving licence or enrol in University. In our own experience, it was nearly debilitating. My mum had two children to raise, and she couldn’t even get around.”

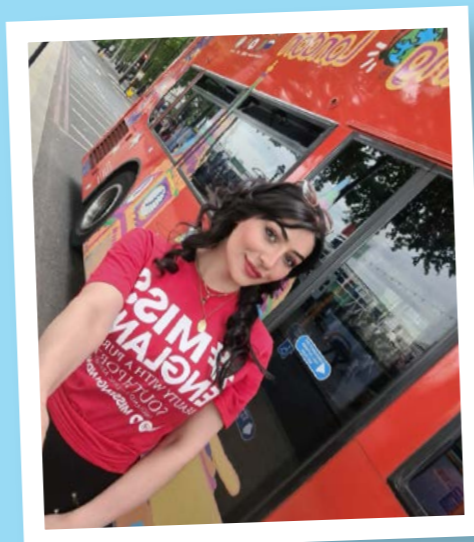
Times were tough. The language was difficult to learn. There were no job prospects, no transport, very little income and owing to laws preventing asylum seekers from working, there were no possible means to earn or build a future. There was a ray of hope however - some family friends, met through charitable organisations, who were “absolutely incredible” in difficult times. They would connect Roza’s mum with opportunities, help with forms and day-to-day tasks. They were a lifeline for the family in an unfamiliar place. Friends that will always have a place in our lives, and never be forgotten, Roza recalls.

It was 2001 when Roza’s family fled the Kurdistan region of Iraq which was still reeling under the regime of brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein.

During the worst of the regime in the late 1980s, many Kurdish people faced displacement, as they were forced to leave the region for fear of safety. Most were not to return until years later, and as a result their education, work, and entire lives were permanently disrupted. Many young Kurds in those times wouldn’t receive further education until decades later, if at all. Roza’s mother was no exception to these circumstances.

After coming to England and creating a life here, Roza’s mother worked hard to learn the language, obtain the equivalent of A-Levels, and thus went on to study law at Plymouth University, qualifying and now working as an immigration lawyer in London; helping other refugees arriving in the country. Her mother’s strength and kindness have been an inspiration for Roza, and the value of a proper education is something instilled in her family.

From the earliest age, Roza knew the importance of school. Despite English being her second language, she recalls how through hard work and determination, she got into the secondary school of her choice, Notre Dame RC School for Girls. There were several schools closer to her home but Roza had her heart set on Notre Dame, where she describes the teaching as “beautiful”, and where the teachers had a powerful impact on the pupils’ self-esteem.



“Growing up we spend most of our time at school”, said Roza “So our upbringing can be determined by our school life.”

As a Roman Catholic school, Notre Dame exposed Roza to two different religions from a young age giving her a broader view of the world, given that she is of Muslim faith. She found that the monotheistic religions all shared the same core principles, and have many similarities. She describes herself as innately spiritual and said “I truly believe that God loves us and wants what’s best for us.”

“I have always believed in God; and from personal experience I’ve reconciled that he won’t present you with something you cannot handle.”

Fond memories of Plymouth go far beyond the school gates. Roza remembers heading to the beach at the first glint of a hot summer day. Bovisand and Looe with her family were regular days out. A privilege that comes with living in Plymouth which she misses deeply since moving to London.

The bright lights of the capital came with big opportunities as Roza soon learnt. Figuring out what to do with her life was the next challenge. She initially followed a passion for architecture and decided to study the subject at the University of Greenwich. But later, she would pursue a career within medicine and healthcare.

Roza has always been passionate about art and still paints regularly to this day. However, Roza soon realised that architecture, though it was enjoyable, was not the career for her future. A decision which raised concerns among family and friends.

Roza had the realisation that she did not want to pursue it as a career, and she needed to change direction. She decided to take a leap of faith, which paid off in ways she could have never imagined at that time.

“My parents suggested going for a career in medical science, so I applied for a degree in biomedical sciences and got accepted to a

second university without even being asked for an interview.”  
Roza’s gamble paid off when she was accepted onto the degree course for all three universities which she applied to, and thereafter, she chose to study at University of Westminster.

“That’s something I often tell people, that it’s ok to try. Challenging yourself to do things you don’t think you can achieve is valuable. I had no plan, I was feeling lost from losing my passion for architecture. But I didn’t realise that those obstacles were merely a redirect. It was leading me to where I needed to be. For fulfilment, happiness and carrying out my vocation.

**“My message to people, especially those who are struggling or going through something they feel can’t come back from, or to those who they feel like life has done them a disservice, is that you have to think of it in one way. Sometimes the adversities we face can become our best weapon.”**

This attitude to life served Roza well when she happened upon a social media advert in the middle of the night. She was up late studying for an exam and was exhausted. Scrolling through Instagram, an advert for the Miss World competition popped up. She applied and went back to bed, only to receive an email the next morning inviting her to audition.

Roza won over the judges and was accepted to compete for the Miss England title. The reality of the competition however was quite different to what she had imagined.

She explained: “I didn’t quite perceive just how much hard work was involved. I would actually say it’s more a judgement of character than appearance.”

“They look for charismatic, confident, and successful women. You have to really show your personality, and they task you with all sorts of things, fundraisers for charity, impactful and

positive campaigns, and shows of talent. It’s really time-consuming work to be honest.”

Having made the semi-finals of the Miss World competition, Roza will now compete to represent England.

She explained that regardless of the results, she is really glad she is having this unique experience.

“Taking part in Miss England was a very spontaneous decision, I didn’t plan for it; but of course I don’t regret it, it has presented me with countless opportunities.”

At age 25, Roza has a wealth of life experience and qualifications. She believes much of her positive outlook stems from a love of books and reading.

“I’ve been an avid reader since my young teenage years”, she explained. “It’s very impactful and had such an influence on my mindset and how you go about things in life. I would urge parents and children to read books on a regular basis to get that extra level of perception.”

Books aside, Roza is quick to explain that her mother is the true inspiration in her life: “She is the one woman I look up to most, I’ve never looked up to celebrities.

“At times when I’ve felt incapable, she’s shown me by example that you can do anything you set out to do, if you really want it.

Roza is now on the precipice of opening her own medical clinic within London, and her book, by the name of ‘Journey of a Thousand Kurds’ is due to be published in the new year.



# MICE ADVICE

## Why are mice a pest?

Mice carry parasites and spread diseases such as salmonellosis and other food poisoning bacteria. They can damage homes and furniture by gnawing through wood and plastic. They have even been known to cause fires by chewing through electrical cables.

## Where are they found?

Nests may be found in houses and flats as well as burrows in gardens and signs include droppings and gnawing marks.

Mice often move between individual flats and terraced properties and can squeeze through holes as small as a pencil and are good climbers. They nest in loft spaces and under floors and can reproduce and spread quickly. It is therefore very important to tackle any signs of infestation at the earliest opportunity before the issue gets worse and affects neighbouring properties.

## What you should do

People are often frightened of mice and there is a stigma of having mice in your property. However, it is imperative to treat such issues as soon as detected.

## Under our Pest Control policy this is your responsibility to undertake.

You can contact Plymouth City Council's Pest Control team to do this on **01752 304147** or [pestcontrol@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:pestcontrol@plymouth.gov.uk)

A fee of £95 will be made for two treatment visits. Further details can be found at: [plymouth.gov.uk/animalsandpests](http://plymouth.gov.uk/animalsandpests)

Our Repairs team will fill in any cracks or holes once the mice have gone. Please let us know by calling us on **0808 230 6500** or by reporting a repair through your MyPCH account.

If the problem is affecting a block of flats, communal areas, or affecting multiple flats, you should let us know straight away so we can arrange for our own pest control contractor to treat all affected areas at the same time.

## How to prevent a mice infestation

- Keep your home in a clean condition and structurally sound
- Block up all possible entry points with steel wool or cement/mortar
- Let us know if you have broken drains, pipework, or windows
- Avoid leaving food lying around in open containers
- Clear away food waste into bins that have a tight-fitting lid
- Wash up dirty dishes as soon as you can
- Keep pet food bowls clean
- Avoid stacking of old newspapers and clothes as mice love to nest there
- Keep gardens cut back and remove all excess vegetation
- Minimise feeding of wild birds in your garden and cleanup any spilt food



# HOW TO STOP DAMP AND MOULD

Continuous damp and mould can be bad for your health. As the weather gets colder in the months ahead, it's important to take steps to prevent damp and mould from building up at home.

## It's all about airflow

One thing to keep in mind when preventing damp and mould is air flow.

Ensuring there is space for air to move will help prevent condensation from building up.

This goes for just about everything from gaps between furniture and the walls, to the inside of cupboards and drawers if they are too full.

Stopping mould can be easy if you follow these simple steps:

- Open windows for a while each day, or use trickle vents
- Leave a small gap between furniture and walls so air can circulate
- Keep air vents free from obstructions
- Maintain a low heat in your home when it's cold or wet

## Cooking

- Use a lid if boiling things in a pan – this will save energy, speed up the cooking process and stop steam from escaping
- Whether you are roasting, frying, or boiling, this will generate steam. Use the extractor fan or open a window briefly to allow steam to escape

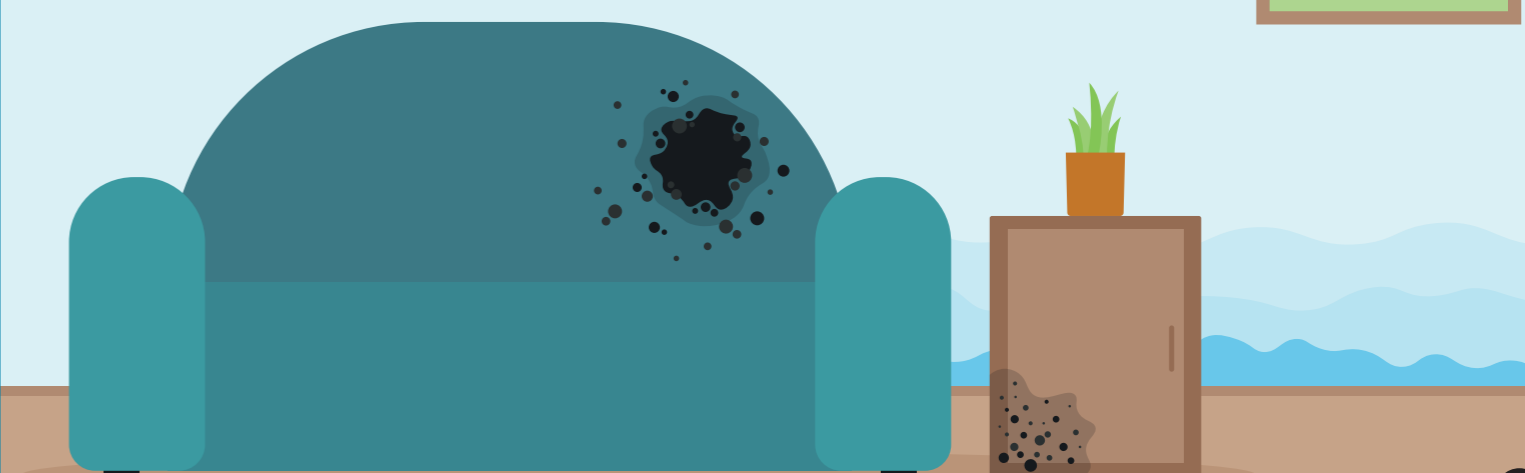
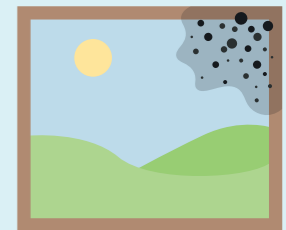
## Washing

- Dry clothes outside where possible
- If drying clothes indoors, try to leave a window slightly open
- Open a window briefly after doing the dishes
- Shut the bathroom door when having a shower or bath
- Make sure extractor fans are on and working

Sometimes damp can be caused by external factors such as guttering or roofing.

If you have concerns about damp or mould, or think that a persistent issue may be caused from water outside leaking into your home, please contact your Housing Officer.

Mould will grow in places with a lot of moisture, such as around leaks in roofs, windows, or pipes, or where there has been flooding





# HOW WE LISTENED, HOW WE ACTED, HOW WE IMPROVED

At Plymouth Community Homes we will always try to avoid a situation that could lead to a resident making a complaint. However, we also understand that the ability and freedom for residents to make complaints is important, and can be a positive thing if it leads to improvements in the way we work.

Every year we look at four key pieces of information which can indicate areas where we can improve:

## Amount of complaints

Have the number of complaints increased or reduced?

## Nature of the complaint

Is there an increase or decrease in the type of complaints overall?

## Outcome

What was the result of the complaint, and was the complaint upheld?

## Lessons learnt

Did we identify areas of our service that could be improved to prevent future complaints?

Below are some examples of Stage 1 complaints. Complaints can be escalated to stages 2 and eventually 3, if the resident is not satisfied that an issue has been rectified.

### How we listened

The electrical team received a complaint regarding a broken venting system taking too long to fix. This was due to a delay in a replacement part being delivered.

### What we did

The Electrical Manager created a list for all types of parts that may be required to complete repairs and provided it to the stores department. This enabled them to complete the repair without having to wait for bespoke parts to be ordered.

### Learning and improvement

Keeping certain parts of this model in stock could ensure that future repairs could be completed quickly. This could also be broadened to other equipment in other departments.

### How we listened

A complaint was received regarding a third appointment letter sent by the gas department to a resident. The wording of the letter had caused the person concern and anxiety.

### What we did

A review of the letter was conducted, and changes were made to some of the wording and the look and feel of the letter's contents.

### Learning and improvement

When communicating with residents on issues relating to heating, potential concerns over safety should be always be considered. As such, the wording of letters will be considered more carefully so as to not cause alarm.



### How we listened

Some residents had complained that dust sheets had not always been used properly when working in a resident's home.

### What we did

Ensured certain equipment – such as dust sheets - are always in work vans, so inspections can be carried out on the first appointment.

### Learning and improvement

Making sure that vans are better equipped with certain types of equipment could ensure that our staff would be better equipped to complete a range of jobs from the offset. This was also highlighted to our contractors via our Contractor Complaints meeting.

### Complaint training

As part of our review process, by the end of this year more than 100 PCH staff will have received complaint training. A number that will continue to grow.

This training will equip staff with knowledge of how to prevent situations that could lead to complaints, while ensuring that the complaints procedure is fully accessible and transparent for our residents.

These tables show the amount of Stage 1 complaints we received, and how many of those complaints escalated to Stage 2.

	Stage 1			Stage 2			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	
Q1	82	41	70	Q1	1	1	7
Q2	81	62	77	Q2	3	4	5
Q3	84	55	70	Q3	2	4	2
Q4	64	78	82	Q4	1	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>

## HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT IN TOUCH

Would you like to be involved in deciding what's featured in this magazine? If so, we would love to hear from you.

We always want residents to be front and centre when deciding what In Touch focuses on.

This is a magazine for PCH residents, and we want you to have as much input as possible.

If you would like to be contacted about playing a role in the magazine's stories, please email us on [news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)

If you don't have access to the internet, please contact your Housing Officer who'll be happy to help.



# LOAN SHARKS RUIN LIVES

As lots of people face a financial squeeze this winter, residents are urged to be extra vigilant to avoid selfish loan sharks preying on vulnerable people.

Loan sharks ruin lives. They seek to exploit those in financial need and take eye watering sums of money from them, sometimes for years after an initial loan.

## What is a loan shark?

Loan sharks prey on vulnerable people by offering to lend money in a time of need. They then demand a high level of interest meaning the debt continues to grow.

Sometimes loan sharks can use intimidating tactics and even demand personal items such as a passport to obtain more money.

## How to spot signs of a loan shark

If someone has offered you a cash loan, then answering yes to any of the following questions could mean you're borrowing from a loan shark:

- Did they not give you paperwork?
- Have they taken any of your valuables or identification such as your bank card, benefit card, or passport?
- Do you feel worried about telling people?
- Did they add huge amounts of interest to your loan?
- Have they threatened you or acted in an intimidating way?

## Borrowing from people you know

Lending from friends or family is perfectly ok. People close to you helping you financially, or lending someone else money yourself, is completely legal and doesn't have to be registered in any formal way.

However, if someone you know uses intimidating tactics - such as harassment - to reclaim money, this is not acceptable, even if you know the person or struggle to pay them back in an agreed time.

For more information about loan sharks, or if you have concerns about you or someone you know, please contact your Housing Officer, or head online and visit [www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk)



**Over 1 million people in the UK are in debt to illegal loan sharks**

Centre for Social Justice



## WOODTURNING A HIT WITH 'CRAFTY' RESIDENTS



Residents at The Beacon were treated to a crash course in woodwork from the Men's Shed group recently.

Children and parents alike tried their hands at woodturning, an ancient method of crafting a range of useful items, such as bespoke pens, bowls or decorated wooden spoons.

Groups were shown how it worked and then invited to have a go.

The Men's Shed is open to anyone wanting to try their hand at getting 'crafty' with wood.

The scheme was launched to combat loneliness and regularly at the group recently sold their first pair of handmade benches. All funds raised go back into resources for the group.

Communities worker, Ryan Huws said: "It's a very friendly group who welcome anyone. You don't even need to own a screwdriver as we can teach you the most basic skills from the get-go.

**"It's a great place to socialise and learn."**

"We had a great turnout at The Beacon. Children and parents were shown how to use lots of tools and we even made some birdboxes under supervision from experienced woodworkers."

He added: "We're really keen to be out and about in the community and always encourage anyone to come and give it a try."

The sessions are held regularly and if you would like to attend, please contact Ryan Huws on **07702632854** or email: [rheinalt.huws@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:rheinalt.huws@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)

## AN ILLUMINATING INSTALLATION

Residents celebrated in July as a bespoke metal replica of Smeaton's Tower was permanently placed outside Morley Court in the City Centre.

The prominent position of the tower – just off Western Approach - will be seen by commuters in and out of the city centre.

The lighthouse was created and donated to residents by ARC Metalcraft, which wanted to give something back to the community after carrying out work in the area on behalf of Plymouth Community Homes. ARC Metalcraft also donated a commemorative planter based upon the Mayflower ship to a PCH community at Notte Street on the Barbican to celebrate the Mayflower 400.

Halwell Projects, MG Scaffolders and L&J Electrical Services also contributed to the project by donating time, work and materials. The artwork around the planter was designed and painted by John Lily and the flowers were installed by Primrose Landscape Architects.

Residents of Morley Court who live on the side of Western Approach were consulted about the project and helped with the design process. Many liked the idea of creating a replica of Smeaton's Tower which they thought represented Plymouth so well. They also suggested painting blue waves around the replica to represent the waves of the sea.

Last night, residents, PCH housing officers and those who worked on the project were invited to the roof garden at Morley Court to celebrate the installation of the lighthouse.

Residents are delighted with the new feature outside their homes and agreed it will make people stop and look as they pass by every day.

Sue Mackay, resident at Morley Court, said: "It is amazing, and it has been placed on top of the vent that wasn't very attractive, but it is looking great. I am going to volunteer to help and try to look after it where I can.

"I have been at Morley Court for five years now, and this flat has saved my life so in my new lease of life I want to help everyone and everything and if I can help by looking after the new lighthouse then I will."

Sarah Chidgey, PCH Housing Officer, said: "The idea started when I mentioned I'm really interested in street art, and how it makes people feel about where they live.

"I thought how nice it would be for a piece of bespoke artwork to be created for this community, and had some really nice conversations with residents, with some telling me about their time in the Navy, and what the sea and Plymouth meant to them."



## TOY GIVEAWAY A HIT AT THE BEACON

Excited children and their families visited The Beacon for a toy giveaway in July, kicking their summer holidays off to a great start.

Toys and books - suitable for all ages - were taken home by delighted kids from the area.

Toys up for grabs included skateboards, bikes, guitars, small trampolines, miniature cars and more.

Around 50 children left with huge smiles on their faces, while their parents were left lugging the new toys home.

Some families were already at The Beacon for the Hobbies and Coffees session with their parents, but more than 15 families popped down especially for the event.

Harley Swabey, age 4, was so happy to be at The Beacon and couldn't contain his excitement. He said: "This is the best day ever. I always wanted a skateboard and now I finally have one."

All of the toys were restored by PCH's Re-use Centre team. The centre gives all manner of household items a second life for families who need items.



Donna Vickers, who runs the Re-use Centre, said: "The event at the Beacon was a huge success, the sun was shining, the children were happy and it was such a good day. The smiles on little faces were priceless and we had some really amazing feedback from the adults too.

**"To hear a child say that it was the 'best day ever' really makes you feel good about what we're doing."**

Donna added: "It's great to be a small part of something that can make such a big difference to them. We are now sorting out and cleaning up more toys for the next big Toy Giveaway, so if you're free, come and see us then, and pick up a free toy."

More toy giveaways will happen again in the future, once the Re-use Centre has a good stock of giveaway items. We will let you know when the next planned giveaway is.

At PCH, we are always looking for ways to reduce our impact on the planet. This is why we chose a carbon balanced printer to produce this magazine.

For every magazine printed, money is donated to the World Land Trust, which helps protect and restore land, allowing nature to thrive.

The protected land and is given back to nature, this helps to offset the impact of making our print publications.



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# DISCOUNT FOOD THAT'S TOO GOOD TO GO

If you have a smartphone, there is a handy new application to help you grab great bargains at the supermarket whilst reducing food waste.

A huge amount of food is thrown away in the UK, which is bad for the planet and hard to comprehend when some people are struggling to afford the weekly shop.

Too Good to Go is a smartphone app that can alert you when reduced food is on sale. The app uses your location to let you know which shops in your area are selling food at a reduced price.

'Magic bags' are listed on the app which can be collected towards the end of the day.

The bags are items that the trader would otherwise throw away, so the price is heavily reduced. Although you do not know which items you are getting, there are big discounts with every bag.

The app also includes very cheap deals in some restaurants and pubs. To download the app and give it a try, open either the Appstore for iPhone users, or the Google Play store for Android phone users and search for 'Too Good to Go'.



## RANGER NOT STUMPED FOR IDEAS

Basking in the garden sun will be easy for one Crownhill family as a creative PCH Ranger turned an old tree stump into a beautiful bench.

The tree had died some time ago and due to where the tree was in the garden, the normal process of "grinding the stump down" couldn't be completed.

Quick thinking Ranger Mark Fuller decided that the best use for the stump was to offer some rustic seating.

The property is currently empty but when new residents move in, they'll find a bespoke wooden bench facing views of a forest behind the house.

Mark said: **"It only took around 20 minutes extra to complete and made sense to do something special."**

"We couldn't grind the stump away due to the awkward angle, so I thought it better to do something creative. The tree was wide enough to make a bench, which you don't come across all that often, so I thought - why not?"

He added: "I hope whoever moves into the property enjoys it."



## HELP WITH ENERGY BILLS

The price you pay for energy has risen sharply but in September the government announced it would step-in to limit the amount people could be charged for their gas and electric bills.

Earlier this year you should have received a £150 Council Tax rebate as part of the measures to help. If you still have not received your rebate, please contact Plymouth City Council.

An additional £400 will be deducted from your energy bills automatically and although this is separate to the help announced in September, this money - like the rebate - will not need to be paid back. And you do not need to do anything to claim your £400 discount, as this will be applied to your bill automatically by your energy supplier(s).

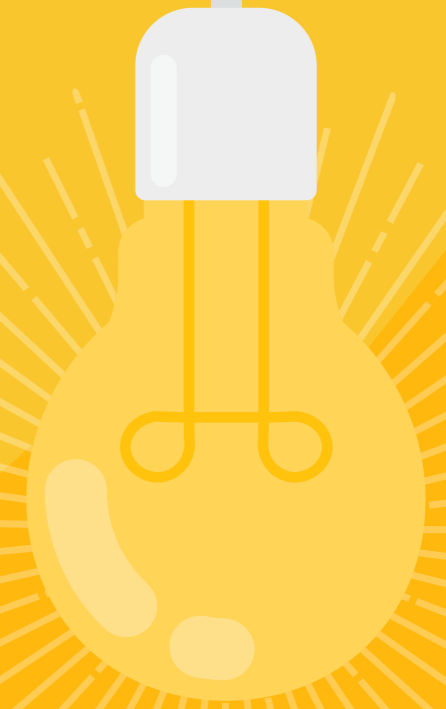
Extra money will be available to those living with disabilities or claiming Universal Credit.

### What does this mean for my bills?

A price increase that was expected will be less severe than previously thought. However, your energy bills will rise slightly regardless.

### Do I need to do anything?

No, unless you have yet to claim your Council Tax rebate, then all help will be discounted from your bills automatically.



## Energy saving tips

### What temperature is best?

For most people, 18 - 20 degrees is a comfortable temperature. However, if you are older or have health conditions, around 20 -22 degrees may be more suitable. Energy experts estimate that turning your heating down by just one degree could help households make potential savings of up to £127.70 however – so make sure you keep a close eye on the temperature your heating is set to.

### Say bye to stand-by!

Even when appliances are on standby, they are still using a small amount of electricity over a long period. Fully turning-off appliances and switching off plugs at the socket could save you up to £55 over a year, as well as being much better for the environment.

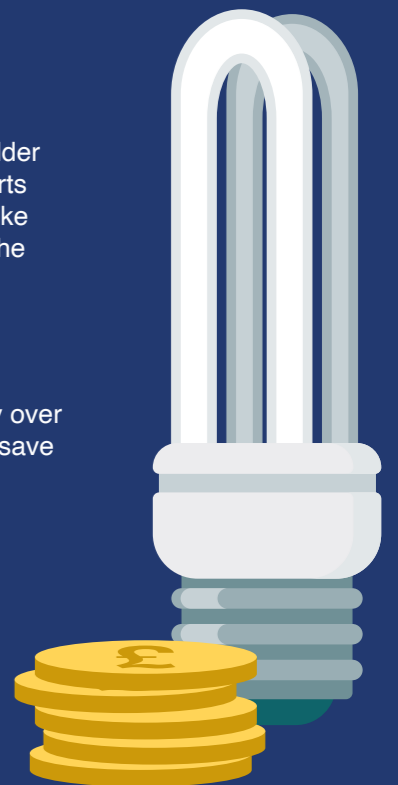
### Pop the kettle on, but don't always fill it

Boiling a kettle uses a lot of electricity in a short period of time. In fact, the UK power grid regularly sees considerable boosts in demand after popular television shows finish, as millions of people then choose to make a cuppa. So when you stick the kettle on, make sure you're pouring in only as much water as you need, to reduce the energy use from the kettle each time.

### Replace old light bulbs with LEDs

LED light bulbs are now inexpensive to purchase and are far more energy efficient than conventional light bulbs. When a light bulb goes, try using an LED replacement. It'll save you money in the long run.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, please let us know as soon as possible, as our Incomes and Financial Inclusion Team may be able to help. Please contact us on **0800 028 0350** or **01752 388121**



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We're always keen to hear what you're up to, so if you'd like to tell us about something we can include in In Touch, we'd love to hear it.

Email [news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk](mailto:news@plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk)

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