

Keeping *in* Touch



SUMMARY OF MAIN CHANGES

- a new Resident Involvement & Consultation Policy, opening up opportunities for all residents to be involved
- an end to the £2 charge for membership of the Residents Forum
- all eligible tenants will be able to apply for a welfare grant
- a new policy and process for dealing with complaints.

HAVE YOUR SAY!

We're making changes to the way we involve and consult our residents

Have you ever thought it would be nice to have more say in the way your home or estate is managed or how we provide our services to you? If so, and you have a bit of time to spare, there are a whole range of ways you can be involved.

In this *Have Your Say Special Edition*, we're launching our new Resident Involvement and Consultation Policy which aims to give all of our customers the opportunity to get involved in a way that suits them and their lifestyles.

Here are some examples:

- apply to join our Residents Panel
- join our Virtual Panel
- apply to join our Board
- set up your own Residents Association

More information on all these options is provided inside this edition.

Prize draw winners

The winners of the March prize draw for Resident Forum members are:

Ms Mills from High Wycombe

Mr Blackwell from Saunderton

Ms Henniche from Hughenden Valley

Please note that as we will no longer be collecting the £2 membership fee for the Residents Forum, this will be our last prize draw.

HAVE YOUR SAY - ways that you can get involved

Apply to join our Residents Panel

Our new Residents Panel will meet four times a year, either at our offices in Stokenchurch or at a venue in Slough. The Panel will monitor how we are delivering our services and meeting our performance targets. The Panel will also act as a sounding board for policies and procedures as they affect customers.

Join our Virtual Panel

If you just don't have the time, or are not interested or able to attend meetings, but still would like to have the opportunity to be involved, why not join our Virtual Panel? For example, we might want to get your views on a proposed new policy which affects our customers or a new leaflet we're drafting. We can write to you or email you for your comments. Your input will help us to gauge whether our policies and leaflets are accessible and clear to understand.

Set up your own Residents Association

If you and a group of your neighbours want to have a much greater say in the way your particular housing scheme or estate is managed, you could consider setting up your own Residents Association. Bucks Housing will encourage and support Residents Associations as long as they are properly constituted and they meet the required criteria to be formally recognised.

If you're interested in finding out more about any of these opportunities to get involved, please give us a call or email info@bucksha.co.uk

Vacancy for a Resident Board Member

If you can commit to attending six meetings a year, at our offices in Stokenchurch, and you want to be at the centre of how Bucks Housing is run and its plans for the future, why not apply to join our Board?

We'll give you a proper induction, regular training and ongoing support so that you're best placed to make the most effective contribution and so that you get the most out of it too!

If you're interested, please contact Helen Green on 01494 480340 or helen@bucksha.co.uk

A Helping Hand

You may be aware that Bucks Housing has operated a **Tenant Welfare Fund** for a number of years. This was set up to provide a little help to customers experiencing financial difficulties, by providing the opportunity to apply for a one-off grant of up to £250 to purchase specific goods. However, before a resident could apply, they had to be a member of the Residents Forum, for which there was a £2 per year membership fee.

We have now reviewed these arrangements and withdrawn the £2 fee. This means that most of our customers can apply for a grant, if they can provide clear evidence of financial hardship.

Residents can also obtain free second hand furniture and equipment in good condition from Central Aid in High Wycombe, up to a value of £100. We're also trying to set up a similar arrangement with a furniture project in Slough.

For more information, please give us a call or email info@bucksha.co.uk

Please remember, if you have an item of furniture you no longer need, you could donate it to Central Aid (High Wycombe), the Slough Furniture Project or another similar charity.

NEW COMPLAINTS POLICY

What can you do if things go wrong?

At Bucks Housing, we always do our best to get things right, but, we're only human, and we do sometimes get things wrong. When we do, we want to hear about it, so we can do things better next time. So please don't hold back if you feel you've been let down.

Our new Complaints Policy makes it easy for you to make a complaint if you feel we haven't given you a good service or we haven't done what we promised to do. You can complain in writing, by email, via our website (soon!), over the phone or in person - either at our office or if a staff member is visiting you at home.

We will always take your complaint seriously and will aim to investigate and resolve the issue promptly. We will also keep you informed throughout the process.

If we've tried to resolve your complaint, but you're still not happy, you have the right to present your case, in person, to an Appeal Panel. If you're still not happy after the Appeal Panel has considered your complaint, you can refer your complaint to your local MP, a local councillor or, after a period of 8 weeks, to the Housing Ombudsman.

There are some things we won't deal with under our Complaints Policy. Examples include:

- Requests for service, for example, if you want to report, or chase, a repair, or you are reporting anti-social behaviour. Such issues may become a complaint if you feel we have failed to respond appropriately
- Cases where we are not responsible for delivering the service being complained about, for example, complaints about Housing Benefit or Universal Credit
- Disputes over the terms of your tenancy or lease agreement
- Complaints made more than 3 months after the event
- Situations where the customer refuses to engage in a reasonable manner and / or is abusive to staff
- Cases where we feel that there is a more appropriate way to resolve a dispute, e.g. through the courts.

If you're in any doubt about how our new policy works, or how you can make a complaint, please give us a call.

ARE YOUR HOME CONTENTS INSURED?

You should be aware that Bucks Housing does not insure your furniture, belongings or decorations against theft, vandalism, burst pipes or other household risks.

The good news is that the National Housing Federation (NHF) has set up a special scheme enabling residents to insure their contents in an easily affordable way.

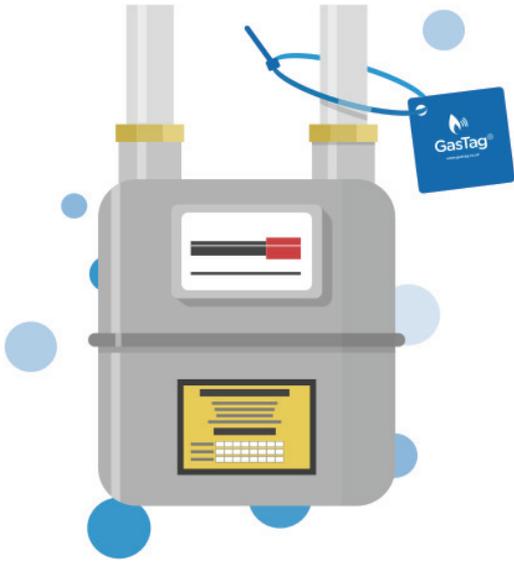


Some advantages of the scheme include:

- fortnightly, monthly or annual payment options
- you do not have to have a bank account
- there is no excess i.e. you don't have to pay the first part of any claim
- it covers fire, theft, flood, water damage and other household risks
- it covers damage to internal decorations
- it covers lost or stolen keys and freezer contents
- you do not need to have special door or window locks.

For more information, you can contact us at info@bucksha.co.uk and we will send you a leaflet and application form or you can contact the scheme direct on 0345 4507288.

GAS TAG HAS ARRIVED!



As you will know, it is a legal requirement for your gas boiler, and any other gas appliances which Bucks Housing has provided in your home, to receive an annual safety check. This is to make sure that they are operating correctly and to highlight any issues which could be a health and safety risk. As part of this year's annual

safety check, our contractor will be fitting a small blue tag to your gas meter called a GasTag.

GasTag is a new product which we have purchased to help us make sure that all of our gas safety checks are fully up to date. It also provides both us and you with the reassurance of knowing that any engineer working on your gas appliances, is Gas Safe registered and fully qualified to do the work.

We would like to reassure you that GasTag is nothing to do with your gas supply and does not monitor your gas usage in any way. If you have any concerns or questions about GasTag, please contact us at the office and we will be pleased to provide further information.

PANDA HAS ESCAPED!

In our December issue, we advised you that PANDA Service & Maintenance had taken over our Out of Hours emergency repair service... well unfortunately, in January, PANDA pulled the plug and walked away from the contract!

However, thanks to a group of our regular heating engineers stepping into the breach, they will be covering our Out of Hours service from now on. This means that if you have to report an emergency repair when our office is closed, it should be a familiar face turning up to help you.

If you have a **genuine emergency** when our office is closed, please call the following number - 07900 916874 – and you'll be redirected to the contractor on call that week.

BIN IT, DON'T BLOCK IT!

Did you know...?

- there are 6.7m blocked drains each year in the UK?
- that 6,000 homes and gardens in the Thames Water region flood with sewage each year due to blockages?

Please ensure you keep your drains blockage free, by putting the following items in the bin and not down the sink or toilet:

- fat and oil
- food waste
- wet wipes
- kitchen roll
- sanitary towels
- tampons
- condoms
- dental floss
- cotton buds
- plasters and bandages
- nappies
- incontinence products.

These tips might help:

- scrape all food and fat off dishes before washing up or loading the dish washer
- pour fat into an old yoghurt / margarine tub or similar to cool down – it can then be binned
- have a bin in the bathroom to discourage flushing items away.

Please remember that we will recharge tenants if we are called out for a blocked drain which has been caused by tenant misuse.