

# Keeping *in* Touch



## ANNUAL RESIDENTS' MEETING

On Saturday 8 September, approximately 30 residents, board members and staff came together in Stokenchurch for our Annual Residents' Meeting.

Tara Webb, Chair of the Residents' Panel, opened proceedings with a review of activity over the last year. Next, Phil Green, Chief Executive, introduced our Annual Report (2017/18) – please see the copy enclosed with this newsletter. Phil Green then went on to launch our new Strategic Plan, outlining Bucks Housing's plans for the next five years.

Residents were interested to hear from Ian Harwood, Maintenance Manager, about our forthcoming stock condition survey. All properties will be surveyed over the next year, looking at the main building components (including roofs, bathrooms, kitchens and insulation). The information from the survey will help us develop our future planned maintenance programmes.

Other topics discussed at the meeting were our new arrangements for resident involvement, our performance in areas such as rent arrears and repairs and our new lettable standard for empty properties. The meeting was followed by a buffet lunch.

Phil Green writes: ***'Many thanks to all those who gave up their Saturday morning to come along. We know that getting to meetings isn't always easy for residents and we are looking at ways in which we can come to you. Watch this space for details of our forthcoming road shows.'***

## Introducing our new Strategic Plan

Our Strategic Plan outlines our proposals for the next five years. It is underpinned by the following objectives:

- ❖ **Customer Focus** – including improving the quality of our maintenance service, providing more meaningful ways of engaging with residents and continuing to provide a responsive, supportive service.
- ❖ **Smarter working** – including a focus on value for money and on making better use of technology.
- ❖ **Ambition** - developing more homes, as well as reinvesting in our existing properties.
- ❖ **Independence** - continuing to operate as a small, independent, 'niche' provider of social housing.



# UNIVERSAL CREDIT IS NOW LIVE IN OUR AREAS

Universal Credit (UC) will affect the way benefits are paid. Hopefully the following information will help answer any questions you may have.

## What is UC and how does it work?

UC is a benefit to support you if you're working and on a low income or if you're not working. It will affect you if you are of working age. It will not affect you if you are of pension age.

Instead of getting separate benefit payments, you'll get one single monthly payment, which combines all your benefits.

## How do I claim UC?

You must claim UC online at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). If you don't have access to a computer at home or work, you might be able to use one for free at your local Job Centre, library, Citizen's Advice or council offices.

*Please make sure that where you are asked for details of your landlord, you give our full name – The Buckinghamshire Housing Association Limited.*

## How is UC paid?

UC is paid monthly, direct into your bank account. You must have a bank account to receive your UC payments. You can open a bank account at any high street bank.

If you live with someone as a couple and you are both entitled to UC, you will get one joint payment into one bank account.

## When will I get my money?

UC is paid monthly in arrears and it can take up to five weeks after you make your claim before you get your first payment.

If you are worried about how you will manage until you get your first payment, you may be able to request an advance payment. However, any advance must be repaid from your future UC payments, so it is important to only ask for what you need.

## How do I pay my rent?

Your UC payment will include your Housing Benefit. Your Portal (online via [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) will set out how much you will receive for the housing element of your UC payment.

You must pay your rent, and any service charges, in full to Bucks Housing. The best way of doing this is by setting up a Direct Debit.

## What benefits are affected?

Universal Credit replaces some of the benefits and tax credits that you might be getting now:

- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance

If the total amount comes to more than the maximum amount allowed, your Housing Benefit will be reduced – this is known as the benefit cap.

## Where can I go for further help?

If you need help with a new claim, you can call the Universal Credit helpline free on: **0800 328 9344**.

If you already have an online account and journal you should call the Universal Credit full service helpline free on: **0800 328 5644**.

If you need help with budgeting, you can contact your local Citizens Advice or Shelter Advisor.

Alternatively, you can contact Bucks Housing's Welfare Benefits Officer on **01494 480340**.

## Have you been putting off writing your Will?

### If so, help is at hand via Will Aid

Will Aid, the charity Will writing scheme, is a partnership between the legal profession and nine well known UK charities.

Every November, participating solicitors waive their fee for writing a basic Will. Instead, they invite clients to make a voluntary donation to Will Aid. The suggested amount is £95 for a single basic Will and £150 for a pair of basic 'mirror' Wills.



30 years of  
changing lives

Everyone benefits under the scheme. You get a professionally drawn-up Will and peace of mind, while the charities receive much-needed donations for their work.

Any time from September onwards, you can go to the online postcode search at <http://www.willaid.org.uk/will-makers/find-a-solicitor> or call 0300 0309 558 for details of a solicitor near you.

You then need to contact them direct to make an appointment in November.

Appointments do get filled quickly so be sure to book early.

## Are you pregnant or do you have a child under 4?



If so, you may be interested in the Healthy Start scheme. Under this means-tested scheme, you could be entitled to receive vouchers, to spend in local shops, to help buy some basic foods. Pregnant women and children over one and under four years old can get one £3.10 voucher per week. Children under one year old can get two £3.10 vouchers (£6.20) per week.

The vouchers can be spent on:

- plain cow's milk – whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed
- plain fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables
- infant formula milk that says it can be used from birth and is based on cow's milk.

Women and children getting Healthy Start food vouchers can also get vitamin coupons to swap for free Healthy Start vitamins.

For more information about the scheme, go to [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk) or call 0345 607 6823.

### New Decorating Vouchers Scheme

We are joining forces with Wilko to provide vouchers to those residents moving into one of our properties, where it has been decided by the Maintenance Manager that one or more room needs decorating. We will decide the amount payable and the Wilko vouchers will be issued to the new tenant when they move in. The vouchers will only be able to be spent on decorating materials.

## Are you over 60? Are you considering downsizing or in need of sheltered accommodation?



Bucks Housing owns St Hugh's Close, a sheltered housing scheme for the over 60's, located in the heart of the village of Stokenchurch. It has been designed to help residents live independently whilst offering security and peace of mind. The purpose built properties consist of 32 one and two-bedroom bungalows and two one-bedroom flats. Each property is self contained, with its own front door.

Our experienced Scheme Manager provides advice and support to residents during normal working hours. There is also a 24 hour emergency telephone call alarm system enabling residents to stay safe and confident in their own home. There is a common room where residents can interact, and there is a real sense of community at the scheme.

If you are interested in joining our waiting list for St Hugh's, please contact Housing Management on 01494 480340.

### Trust in Blue minor works scheme

We have been contacted by an organisation, 'Trust in Blue' which employs retired police officers to undertake work in people's homes. Typically they can assist with minor jobs such as decorating, minor plumbing, grounds maintenance and general indoor/outdoor maintenance tasks.

If you have a job which would not come under Bucks Housing's responsibility, you may wish to contact their Helpdesk at [www.trustinblue.com](http://www.trustinblue.com) or 0800 255 0 255.

The Helpdesk will then pass your enquiry to your nearest local handyman, who will contact you to arrange an estimate visit. Some work can be done there and then. Larger jobs will be arranged for a convenient date. Payment is due after the job has been completed.

### New partnership with Slough Furniture Project

For many years, our residents have been able to obtain free second furniture from Central Aid in High Wycombe. To help our residents in Slough, we have now set up similar arrangements with the **Slough Furniture Project**. We have also increased the value of items that residents can receive.

Under both schemes, residents can now receive items up to the value of **£250**. To take advantage of either scheme you need to take along proof that you are a Bucks Housing resident, in the form of your tenancy agreement or a letter of introduction from us.

Please also remember, if you have furniture you no longer need, you can donate items to either project.

You can contact the projects as follows:

Central Aid  
Tel: (01494) 443459

Slough Furniture Project:  
Tel: (01753) 692535

Contact us at:  
The Buckinghamshire  
Housing Association Limited  
Telephone: 01494 480340  
Email: [info@bucksha.co.uk](mailto:info@bucksha.co.uk)  
Website:  
[www.buckshousing.co.uk](http://www.buckshousing.co.uk)