



WILLOW TREE

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

# NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2024

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 [Willow Tree Housing Partnership](#)



# MEET THE TEAM

## EXECUTIVE TEAM



**Donna Johnson**  
CEO



**Catherine  
Davies-Gallagher**  
Finance Director



**Heather Rigg**  
Operations Director



**Sue Sparks**  
Head of  
Corporate Services



## BOARD TEAM



**Sarah O'Neill**  
Chair of Board



**Craig Sullivan**  
Vice Chair of Board



**Brian Whittaker**  
Board Member



**Dev Biddlecombe**  
Board Member



**Sue Lane**  
Board Member, Chair of  
Remuneration and  
Nominations Committee



**Simon Haskell**  
Board Member, Chair of  
Audit & Risk Committee



**Stephen Burtchaell**  
Board Member



**Steve Hayes**  
Board Member



**Wendy Lewis**  
Board Member,  
Chair of Development  
Committee



## STAFF TEAM



**Agnes Cioffi**  
Income Management  
Assistant



**Amanda Webb**  
Business Support  
Team Leader



**Angela Derry**  
Shared Ownership and  
Rentplus Officer



**Bill Fleet**  
Interim Income and  
Expenditure Officer



**Cadhla Geraghty**  
Finance Manager





**Clare Norton**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**David Potter**  
Property Inspector



**Dawn Kirby**  
Property Team Leader



**Debbie Johnson**  
Tenancy Team Leader



**Denise Nurse**  
Housing Officer



**Emma Benney**  
Housing Officer



**Emily Shuttleworth**  
Housing Service  
Operations Lead



**Helen Tamblin**  
Development Assistant



**Jane Eagling**  
Corporate Services  
Assistant



**Janey Matthews**  
Income and  
Expenditure Officer



**Jemma Bailey**  
Corporate Services  
Assistant



**Karen Walker**  
Development Project  
Manager



**Kerry Wood**  
Rent and Income  
Management Officer



**Liz Farmer**  
Corporate Services  
Manager



**Michael Harry**  
Property Inspector



**Molly Richards**  
Income and  
Expenditure Officer



**Neil Buckland**  
Asset Manager



**Ria Gillings**  
Development Project  
Officer



**Roxanne Sweeting**  
Housing Officer



**Sarah Purdy**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Tracy Cox**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Will Lloyd Jones**  
Financial Controller



## OUR VISION

Deliver and Grow

## OUR MISSION

To build and manage safe and comfortable homes that are truly affordable for people who are not in a position to access the housing market

### SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

Enabling staff and tenants to work together to achieve shared goals

### TRUST AND HONESTY

Being willing to listen and learn and be open when we need to improve

### RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

All colleagues and residents can expect mutual courtesy and empathy when times are challenging

### INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Ensuring at all times that we conduct ourselves in a way that reflects the importance of the service we provide

### VERSATILE AND INNOVATIVE

By embracing opportunities and new ways of thinking that will enhance how we deliver

### EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE

By celebrating difference and ensuring that we do not operate in a way that excludes anyone

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# BATTS MEADOW, NORTH PETHERTON OPENING



Willow Tree Housing Partnership worked in partnership with Otter Construct to build seven high quality affordable homes, made up of five affordable rental properties and two shared ownership homes. One larger property was also sold on the open market. Work on the scheme started in 2022 and completed in April 2024, when residents moved in.

Donna Johnson, CEO of Willow Tree Housing Partnership, commended the work of Otter Construct, having worked with them before on previous successful projects. **"It's really important to Somerset, that smaller organisations work with small and medium sized builders to help contribute to keeping a thriving local economy"** she said.

Each of the homes has key features which support our environmental aims they have roof-mounted solar panels, an electric vehicle charger, air source heat pumps, and ground floor under-floor heating. Karen Walker, development project manager, explained how the new homes have been built with sustainability at their core. **"They're designed**

**with the environment in mind,"** she said. In each garden, a 'hedgehog highway' system has been implemented - in order to allow wildlife to move safely and freely between gardens - along with bee boxes.

All of the houses are semi-detached, and the two shared ownership properties are both two-bedroom dwellings. Of the five affordable houses, four are also of two-bedroom size, and the remaining one boasts three bedrooms. Tenants and part owners have already moved into the properties and are starting to make them a home.

**"In April this year we moved into our new home. We no longer have to share a bedroom with our daughter and the additional space to live comfortably is a God send. The house layout and build quality is exceptional. We never could have imagined living in a home this beautiful and it's difficult to put into words what this means to our family. We are very grateful to Willow Tree Housing Partnership giving us the opportunity to live in such a beautiful home back in the village"** - Tenant Suzie.



# COMMUNITY FUND

Willow Tree Housing Partnership presented a cheque for £200 to Little Steps Pre School in North Newton



This is a local charity in a village where we have recently acquired some new homes. Little Steps provides childcare to local children, with an emphasis on learning through play.

The manager of the pre-school informed Willow Tree Housing staff, that the donation would be spent on a new painting easel.

“Willow Tree is passionate about not just building homes but contributing to the community as well. To that end we are delighted that our donation to the Little Steps Pre School at North Newton will help the team to purchase new toys and equipment for the children who clearly enjoy themselves there, if the evidence of our visit is anything to go by.

- Donna Johnson CEO of WTHP

## COMMUNITY GARDEN

Willow Tree Housing pledged £350 towards a gardening project at Boxill Close which has been led by Natalie Harrison - community builder from Four Greens.

Some Willow Tree Housing residents, their children and children from the local community, have been involved with creating a fairy garden, wildlife bed, wildflower meadow with poppies and cornflowers and fruit bed with apple, pear, plum and cherry trees.

A broken children's tent has been repurposed to create a scarecrow, and charity shop items have been used to create the other garden areas. Strawberries and blackberries have been planted along with chocolate cosmos.



# NEW COMPLAINTS POLICY AND COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW

## Complaints

We accept that we don't always get things right! However, how we respond, manage and learn from complaints to develop a positive complaints culture, is something Willow Tree Housing Partnership (WTHP) is committed to.

Three members of our WTHP Residents' Scrutiny Panel, recently met up with six members of staff in our Plymouth office, to review two of our more complex complaints and discuss findings. The group reviewed the complaints in detail, checked our internal process was followed, looked at any recurring issues and trends and identified some 'lessons learned' to help us improve and prevent similar issues occurring again.

It was identified that in general, we were following our complaints process with formal responses being issued within timescales set out in the policy. However, there was room for improvement and key themes were identified particularly around repairs and communications.

In our next newsletter we will provide you with a "You Said, We Did" article based on issues identified and actions taken to address these. Key discussion topics were:

## Complaints Handling

- Importance of timescales and good communication throughout the complaints process, to include overall oversight and 'closing the loop' where there are outstanding actions.
- Provide more options to tenants on their preferred method of communication in general and throughout complaints process.
- Repairs contract management needs more focus to address repairs issues and contractors to be more involved with complaints handling.
- Importance of expressing empathy alongside stating facts in complaints responses.
- Consider responsibility for complaint responses being closer to the front line; sometimes there can be too many people involved.

## General

- Importance of good internal record keeping including better management of mailboxes to avoid lost communications.
- Managing expectations around response times for repairs to avoid repeat/chasing calls and further dissatisfaction.
- Benefits of empowering tenants to self-serve, and to frontline teams to offer early resolution.
- Remove references to 'SWHS' and 'THS' – now WTHP, as service should be the same across all areas.
- Post repair feedback – process needs developing - more/better use of text messaging.
- Develop a comprehensive reporting suite, to ensure that jobs raised are reconciled and scheduled, to appropriately manage any unforeseen changes. This will ensure that tenants expectations are managed and they are appropriately communicated with.

All those that attended agreed that it was a useful and worthwhile session and we will look to repeat these learning sessions again.

## Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024

The Housing Ombudsman issued a new Complaint Handling Code which became statutory on 1 April 2024. Due to the changes made, we have now updated our complaints policy and procedure in line with the requirements of this new Code. The new Policy and Procedure can be found on our website – Make a Complaint ([willowtreehousing.org.uk](https://willowtreehousing.org.uk)).

Anyone can contact the Housing Ombudsman by accessing their website – [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us)  
Email – [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
Telephone – 0300 111 3000

## WTHP Residents' Scrutiny Panel

Our residents' thoughts and opinions are important to us and we are always looking for ways to improve the quality of our housing services. The WTHP Residents' Scrutiny Panel was set up last year, with the first meeting taking place in September 2023. This Panel, who have a link and connection with our Board, is instrumental in helping us ensure that the services we provide meet our residents' need.

Currently we have 6 enthusiastic members who are of course residents of WTHP, and we are really keen to hear from you if you would like to become involved with this panel. At present, the Scrutiny Panel meets up for 2 hours (we would like to meet face to face but as our members are spread out across the South West this is a challenge, we therefore meet virtually; we find Microsoft Teams works well).

If you wanted to get involved, but were unable to commit to attending regular meetings, we will have one-off project work where we would like to get residents' direct input. For instance, before our new website went live, we got feedback at various stages of the design and implementation process from a number of residents on how things looked or how easy it was to navigate the site. Their input was invaluable. Similarly, residents were involved in the interview process when our day to day repairs contracts were due to be renewed. We also have opportunities for our residents to support in staff recruitment or reviewing our handling of complaints (Some of our Panel members were involved with a complaints lesson learned session only recently)

If you are interested in getting involved with resident engagement on any level large or small, please email [customerservices@willowtreehousing.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@willowtreehousing.org.uk) for more information.

## Health & Safety In Communal Areas

Security in communal areas – not leaving rubbish or flammable material, not leaving items like mobile phones, mobility scooters and e-scooters charging, not leaving any items in communal areas or stairways as these could cause a trip or fall, being aware of who is entering the site – only allowing your visitors in through door entry system, only allowing anyone to follow you into communal area if they have a legitimate reason to be there, ensuring that the door closes securely behind you.

Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))





# MEET SOME OF OUR RESIDENT SCRUTINY PANEL



**BRANDON  
NOONAN**

## **How long have you been a tenant of WTHP and where in the Country do you live?**

I've been a tenant for almost a year and a half, before that I was homeless for a year. I live in Plymouth.

## **What do you enjoy about where you live?**

I love living in Plymouth because it has a nice mix of being in the city, but being near countryside and the coast. I've spent quite a lot of money on my flat making it a home. Although I don't have any private outdoor space, we do have a communal garden that I enjoy with my neighbours. When I first moved in, the garden was very plain with just grass. I suggested to neighbours that we get together to improve it and now we have collectively added wild flowers, seasonal flowers, roses, jasmine – it smells and looks good! We have enjoyed some social BBQs together in the summer. I think I have a good landlord and the only downside to my flat is that it's quite small and there isn't a lot of storage.

## **Why did you want to join the Resident Scrutiny Panel?**

I believe that I'm good at bringing communities together from the work that I have independently done as a public figure in the past; I organised and ran free community fun days alongside various businesses in Plymouth. I also established the biggest houseplant giveaway in Plymouth on Facebook during the Covid pandemic. I wanted to demonstrate the importance of equality and diversity in a resident engagement group, I hope that I'm able to represent the LGBTQ community (having won Mr Gay Devon in 2022) and the younger generation of Willow Tree Housing tenants.

## **What has been your experience so far?**

My experience of being a member of the panel has been positive so far, it has been good to listen to other tenants' experiences, opinions and perspectives. To understand that just because an issue doesn't affect me, it doesn't mean that it isn't affecting someone else who is a tenant. It allows me to see the broader picture of what is happening across the board for all tenants.



**DAN  
MILNER**

## **How long have you been a tenant of WTHP and where in the Country do you live?**

I live in Mid Devon in Cullompton. My home was one of the last South Western Housing Society developments before the merger. I have lived there for 7 years.

## **What do you enjoy about where you live?**

I have to be honest, we are not overly keen with the town we live in, but love our house! The house and having WTHP as our landlord is our sole reason for not moving!

## **Why did you want to join the Resident Scrutiny Panel?**

It is a very strong belief of mine, that you have no right to moan if you are not willing to try and help or affect things in the best way you can. This based on the old fashioned, if you don't vote, you have no right to moan. It's not that we've had any issues as such, but that getting involved would give me more of a collective voice to make positive change where needed.

## **What has been your experience so far?**

So far it's been nothing but positive! While residents may not have seen or heard anything specific yet, I know that the panel will make a difference in the future for WTHP and it's tenants. WTHP have shown they are willing to listen and to work towards improving on all levels.





# MEET SOME OF OUR COLLEAGUES



**AMANDA  
WEBB**

## **What did you do before coming to work for WTHP?**

I've worked for Willow Tree Housing for the past 2 years as a Housing Officer; covering from Bridgwater up to Calne. I have recently changed positions and am now the Business Support Team Leader. Previously I worked for Local Authority Housing for 10 years in Property Services, Sheltered Housing and as a General Needs Housing Officer.

## **Tell us about your job and what a typical day is like?**

My day starts with checking my emails and prioritising what needs to be done for the day. I provide guidance and support to the Business Support team, we manage a first line response to our customers both external and internal. We deal with daily responsive repairs calls and forwarding customer information to officers regarding housing management and property queries. We also deal with administration of landlord health and safety. My day is varied and busy and each day brings something different.

## **What are you looking forward to in your job?**

I'm looking forward to working with the team, welcoming new members to the team allowing us to build and focus on delivering an exceptional customer experience.

## **How do you relax outside of work?**

I have two dogs that I walk every day, come rain or shine. This helps to clear my head and relax. I've always got a book to read and I love watching TV!!

## **What is your favourite food?**

I love Italian food; I enjoy the strong, fresh aromatic flavours.

## **Which book or film would you recommend?**

There are so many great films but Thelma and Louise has to be one of my favourites; an explosive road trip with two tough ladies - it's fun, exciting and at times sad. It also has a strong message, to remind us all to follow the road wherever it leads us.



**DAVID  
POTTER**

## **What did you do before coming to work for WTHP?**

I've worked as a Multi Skilled Tradesman for 31 years, with 6 years of this in social housing, and a further 6 years as a Property Surveyor conducting RICS level surveys.

## **Tell us about your job and what a typical day is like?**

My job involves visiting tenant's properties to diagnose defects and arranging for one of WTHP's approved contractors to carry out the work. I oversee and approve the standard of work, and I also get involved with managing projects.

## **What are you looking forward to in your job?**

I very much enjoy meeting the tenants and using my knowledge as a tradesman and Surveyor to diagnose defects. I feel driven to ensure that every tenant is living in a home that is in good condition, that repairs are done in a timely manner, and hope that this makes a difference to the tenant's enjoyment of their property.

## **How do you relax outside of work?**

I live in the country and enjoy going for dog walks and I love camping in Wales with my family. I have led advanced motorcycle groups out on rides where we share our favourite routes and learn best practice. I've become a bit of an eco-warrior recently and now drive an electric vehicle. This year I want to build my running back up to half marathon level and raise more money for charity.

## **What is your favourite food?**

I'm on a bit of a diet so this is a sore point, so apple strudel and cream is off the menu for me at the moment! I like to eat healthily, so salads and vegetables usually.

## **Which book or film would you recommend?**

As a break from Surveying textbooks, I am captivated by Louis De Bernieres Captain Corelli's Mandolin, though as per usual, the film and the book don't have quite the same plot! I've also enjoyed The Durrells TV series and books.



## ROXANNE SWEETING

### What did you do before coming to work for WTHP?

Before working for WTHP, I worked within Insurance and then went to work in a private rent and property management company looking after properties on behalf of a landlord. When I joined WTHP, I started as a Business Support Administrator and then progressed to managing that team. I am now in a new role as a Housing Officer. I have always worked in customer focused roles.

### Tell us about your job and what a typical day is like?

Everyday is different and this is what I enjoy, I like to start work early and take time to read through emails and plan my day/week ahead. It's a busy role and includes lots of different elements, some days can be more admin based and others I am out completing visits all day, which I also enjoy.

### What are you looking forward to in your job?

I'm really enjoying the role, I like meeting and supporting our residents including new residents and being more involved in tenancy related matters. I enjoy the variety of work and that every day is different.

### How do you relax outside of work?

I have a primary school aged little boy who keeps me extremely busy with any free time I get. We enjoy taking our dogs for long walks along the river and footpaths, we often stop for a picnic and at every park, swing or slide we see.

### What is your favourite food?

That's a hard one to answer but if I had to pick one, it would have to be homemade lasagne with salad and garlic bread, yum.

### Which book or film would you recommend?

Firm favourite film of mine is 'The Holiday' especially at Christmas, it really gets you into the Christmas spirit, even in November. I enjoy reading autobiographies; however I would pick a film over reading any day.



## MICHAEL HARRY

### What did you do before coming to work for WTHP?

Prior to joining to WTHP, I worked for a few Social Housing Organisations including Plymouth Community Homes and Guinness Partnership as a Repairs/Property Inspector. I have also worked for the Local Authority where I live, Plymouth City Council.

### Tell us about your job and what a typical day is like?

I start work early, firstly going through my emails and correspondence. I write up the previous day's inspections and liaise with our Business Support Team to raise works orders with our contractors. I arrange appointments with tenants to visit their properties and carry out inspections. I can come across a variety of issues with properties, from damage caused by water ingress or even a faulty shower in a void property. I also check the work carried out by contractors and this includes newly fitted bathrooms and kitchens.

### What are you looking forward to in your job?

I love meeting people, I always try to greet our tenants with a smile. I understand that I'm usually there because something has gone wrong with the property, I want our tenants to know that I'm there to listen to the issues with their property and to help get things sorted.

### How do you relax outside of work?

My wife and I love trying different restaurants and new foods, even better if accompanied by a nice glass of wine or cider! Which is no good when you're trying to lose weight.

### What is your favourite food?

As my wife is from an Asian background I love Thai food, the spicier the better - but I will never say "no" to a decent steak and chips.

### Which book or film would you recommend?

I'm a science-fiction geek, so anything from Star Trek or Star Wars. I also enjoy the Alien horror films, I'm looking forward to seeing the new Alien film later this year.





## COMPLIMENTS FOR OUR STAFF



I honestly can't thank you enough. You quite literally fell out of the sky like an angel. Our new home is lovely and I'm forever grateful.

- Lisa



Please accept this card as a small token of our gratitude. We are truly thankful for the opportunity to live in such a wonderful home.

- Suzie and family



## COMPLIMENTS FOR CONTRACTORS

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Richard and his team for their excellent workmanship. The two lads that did the bathroom and lounge were professional, polite and were very tidy! The gentleman whom came and fitted the fan and came back this morning to sort it was both polite, conscientious and professional. Richard kept me up to date and I knew exactly what was happening. So I would be grateful if you could pass this information on and would highly recommend them to carry out works on any property.

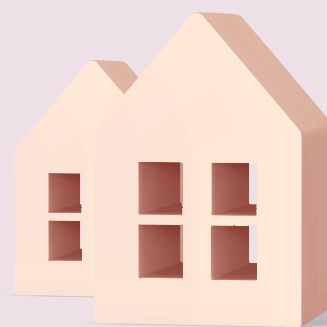


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Why not join in on social media, give our pages a like? We are active on [Facebook](#) with updates on the work we do and regular posts with hints and tips on resident safety #maintenancemonday, #wellbeingwednesday and #safetysaturday

Is there something you'd like to see, let us know!

[www.willowtreehousing.org.uk](http://www.willowtreehousing.org.uk)

**DELIVER & GROW**

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