



WILLOW TREE  
HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

# NEWSLETTER SPRING 2024

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# 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 &  
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



**2 Agnes Cioffi**  
Interim Income  
Management Assistant



**Amanda Webb**  
Housing Officer



**Angela Derry**  
Shared Ownership and  
Rentplus Officer



**Cadhla Geraghty**  
Finance Manager



**Clare Norton**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Dawn Kirby**  
Team Leader Property



**Debbie Johnson**  
Team Leader People



**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



**Karl  
Woodhall-Cooper**  
Interim Maintenance  
Officer



**Kerry Wood**  
Rent & Income  
Management Officer



**Liz Farmer**  
Corporate Services  
Manager



**Mark Johnson**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Molly Richards**  
Income and  
Expenditure Officer



**Neil Buckland**  
Asset Manager



**Ria Gillings**  
Development Project  
Officer



**Roxanne Sweeting**  
Business Support  
Manager



**Sarah Purdy**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Sonja Lewis**  
Financial Analyst



**Tracy Cox**  
Business Support  
Administrator



**Will Lloyd Jones**  
Finance Manager



## 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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## YOU SAID

Residents reported issues with window mechanisms that had seized and were extremely stiff to open

Residents reporting issues with condensation linked to humidity in homes

During winter months some residents struggle with drying clothes in their homes, and it can have an impact on increasing humidity linked to damp, mould and condensation

Residents have been requesting access to high speed broadband

## WE DID!

← We instructed a new supplier, Resolve Doors and Windows, to overhaul the windows by doing works to handles and lubricating mechanisms to ensure the windows are in full working order

← We are providing hygrometer humidity monitors which act as visual reminders to tenants to ventilate rooms by using fans or opening windows and so reduce condensation build up

← We have provided some residents with 12 litre portable dehumidifiers which helps to dry clothes more quickly. They are more cost effective to run than a tumble drier and they reduce the moisture in the air as opposed to using central heating radiators to dry clothes, which can lead to damp or mould issues longer term

← We have had Board approval to sign wayleave agreements with providers to facilitate the installation of fibre broadband in homes. We will be working with CityFibre, based in Plymouth, to support the installation of broadband for residents who have signed up

# CYBER AWARE ADVICE

Advice to keep you and your family secure online by helping to improve your cyber security. As passwords are the gateway to your accounts, here are six actions to make your passwords work harder to protect you

## 1. Create a separate email password

Your inbox contains lots of important information about you. So, if a hacker gets into your email, they could get all your accounts that are linked to it. Create a strong email password and make sure it's different to all your others.

## 2. Create strong passwords using three random words.

Hackers can easily guess weak, short passwords. Use three words that are memorable to you, but are difficult to guess e.g. BlueJamDance, to make a strong password. Hackers will try many different versions of words (Liverpool, L1verpool1, liverpOO!), so use three random words even when you need to add numbers or special characters e.g. BlueJ@mDance1

## 3. Save passwords in your browser

Remembering passwords can be challenging because different websites have different rules. And it's important to have separate passwords for your most important accounts like emails.

Your internet browser will often give you the option to remember your passwords for you (not on a shared device). This is a safe way to store your passwords, helping you create stronger and different passwords without having to remember them all.

## 4. Turn on two-factor authentication (2FA)

2FA is free, and it will stop hackers getting into your account even if they have your password. 2FA (also known as 2-step verification, or multi-factor authentication) simply means you'll be prompted for a second piece of information when signing into your account – usually a code which will be sent via text or email.

## 5. Update your devices

Tech companies are continually working to fix vulnerabilities in their software. So, when you receive prompts to update your devices don't ignore them. They contain important fixes which will help keep hackers out. You can make things even simpler by turning on automatic updates.

## 6. Turn on backup

Backups are best done at regular intervals, so you always have a recent copy of your information (e.g. photos and documents) saved if your data is lost or stolen. But the good news is if you turn on automatic backups your device will do the hard work for you.

# VISIT TO LOW CARBON EXCHANGE

Operations Team with Paul Matthews Training Assessor from Low Carbon Exchange



In January 2024 members of the Operations Team visited Low Carbon Exchange in Weston-super-Mare to find out more about the work they do to support landlords and residents in decarbonising homes through the use of renewable technology and energy efficient building materials.

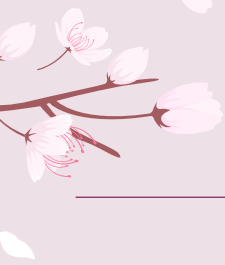
It was a great morning of learning and conversation where the team were shown the latest innovations in the renewables market and how these technologies could benefit our tenants' homes to save energy, reduce costs and ultimately reduce carbon to become more sustainable.

## FOOD BANK

Our Housing Officer Emma Benny worked alongside volunteers at Saltash and Oasis Food banks, to bring some much needed Christmas food hampers to some of our residents in the Saltash and Plymouth areas.

Food banks are a great initiative that are run on a daily basis by volunteers and reliant on donations of food from individuals, families, supermarkets and businesses. Sometimes people may need to access support from a food bank, when they are unable financially to provide food for themselves and their families. The reason for this varies for each individual, it could be due to job loss, struggling on benefits/ low income or due to poor health. The need for Food banks has increased in recent times, due to the increased costs of utility bills, rent and the general cost of living in the UK.





# RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

## Resident Scrutiny Panel and dealing with complaints

In September 2023, the first meeting of the Willow Tree Housing Partnership (WTHP) Residents' Scrutiny Panel took place. The Scrutiny Panel was set up to promote resident engagement and will be instrumental in helping us ensure that the services we provide meet our residents' needs. 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 Panel have a link and connection with the WTHP Board and our new Chair, Sarah O'Neill, recently attended the Scrutiny Panel meeting held in February.

Currently we have 7 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 the panel. At present, the Scrutiny Panel meets up to 6 times a year, virtually 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 so we find Microsoft Teams work well).

A standing Agenda item is the regular review of complaints (anonymised). 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 WTHP is committed to. All of our Staff have undergone training on complaints and we have a Designated Complaints Officer who co-ordinates the whole process. We want to ensure that our complaint handling process is accessible to our residents, that it is consistent and enables the timely progression of a complaint as set out in the Housing Ombudsman code. We complete

an Annual self-assessment with the Housing Ombudsman which enables us to measure our performance and compliance with the code. Our complaints Policy and Procedure can be found on our website:

[www.willowtreehousing.org.uk/make-a-complaint1](http://www.willowtreehousing.org.uk/make-a-complaint1)

Anyone can contact the Housing Ombudsman by accessing their website:

[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us)

### Email

[info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

### Telephone

0300 111 3000

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.

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)



# MEET SOME OF OUR COLLEAGUES

## DENISE NURSE

Joined us in January 2024 as a Housing Officer based in our Plymouth office.



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

Prior to joining WTHP I worked as a Housing Officer in Liskeard, Cornwall. Before working in housing, I was a work coach based in a job centre which means I have a great knowledge of the current UK benefits systems.

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

I'm an early bird, which means I can read my emails and plan my day ahead. I'm out and about in my car for most of the day; contacting residents, signing up people for new properties and out meeting a lot of our residents.

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

Meeting and supporting residents, helping any new residents to set up their stable homes.

### 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 like anything that is sweet!

### Which book or film would you recommend?

Any books by B.A Paris or Mo Hayder. As for films, well it's got to be Gladiator, Forest Gump and Footloose.

## JANEY MATTHEWS

Started with WTHP as a trainee and will be appointed as our Income & Expenditure Officer at the beginning of April this year. She has now successfully completed her AAT level 3 and will soon be undertaking the level 4 course.



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

I was Cabin Crew for British Airways based at Gatwick and Heathrow for 5 years and then Cabin Manager for Easyjet at Bristol Airport for 12 years. I spent a lot of time wearing orange polyester, I loved every minute of it flying to different destinations and working with different crew and Pilots.

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

I deal with a very busy inbox, answering a lot of emails and inputting invoices onto our system. I pay invoices and deal with companies that we owe money to. I also have a lot of invoice queries and deal with different internal departments to resolve them.

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

I enjoy my job and the people I work with, I look

forward to learning more and doing further training.

### How do you relax outside of work?

I really enjoy crocheting. My next project is to make a jumper for my husband, he doesn't normally get anything made as I am too busy making things for other people.

I'm a National Trust member and I enjoy getting out to look around different properties and gardens. I also enjoy walking my dog who is a whippet and called Poppy.

### What is your favourite food?

Without hesitation, definitely Cadbury Creme Eggs.

### Which book or film would you recommend?

Die Hard 1, 2 and 3 - especially at Christmas.



## EMILY SHUTTLEWORTH

Joined us in January in a new role - Housing Service Operations Lead and has hit the ground running! She brings a wealth of housing knowledge and expertise with her.



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

I was Head of Customer Experience at another Housing Association in Cambridgeshire. I've been in housing for 20 years, with about half of that working directly with residents as a Housing Officer.

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

It's a very busy role, there isn't really a typical day! I spend a lot of time supporting our team to resolve queries about day to day housing management and property maintenance issues. As well as working with external partners, including local authorities, contractors and other housing providers. I keep up to date with changes in the laws and regulations we have to follow, making sure our policies and processes do what we need them to. I also respond to residents' feedback to make sure that if something goes wrong, we learn from it and improve our services.

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

We are in the process of recruiting some new colleagues to the Operations Team, so I'm really looking forward to having these roles filled. We can

then focus the teams on strengthening the services we provide.

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

I like to go running a few times a week and often take on challenges. I have recently completed a virtual Lands End to John O'Groats distance challenge and am about halfway through the South West Coastal path challenge. I also take part in some "real" runs, including the Exeter 10k River Run last year and a couple of half marathons. I'm looking forward to the Exeter's Great West Run in May this year.

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

All of it! Probably Mexican if I had to choose, I love the flavours and it's always fun to build your own burritos or fajitas at the table and add extra chillies!

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

There are so many great films to choose from... I like films based on true stories, I don't have the imagination for sci-fi. I watched Legend this week about the Kray twins which was a bit brutal in places but there were also some laugh out loud moments and great acting.

We are a small team here at Willow Tree Housing Partnership. We will be introducing new staff to you in our newsletters and on our website.  
[www.willowtreehousing.org.uk](http://www.willowtreehousing.org.uk)



# FIRE SAFETY IN THE COMMON AREAS OF A BLOCK OF FLATS

Willow Tree Housing Partnership as your landlord take all elements of safety within your home and associated areas very seriously. If you live in a block of flats, we are responsible for your home but also for the communal areas such as walkways, foyers, and stairwells.



This article is based on information provided by the Fire England website:

[fireengland.uk/fire-safety/fire-safety-blocks-flats](https://fireengland.uk/fire-safety/fire-safety-blocks-flats)

Our Housing Management Team carry out regular inspection visits to ensure that visually these areas are safe and secure for our residents; this includes a visual inspection of the fire doors for the communal areas. On top of these inspections, we procure specialist contractors to complete other inspections on our behalf such as; Fire Risk Assessments and checks to fire and smoke alarms.

Health and safety in your home is a joint responsibility and as a tenant you have several responsibilities to ensure you keep your home safe for you, your family and neighbours.

Some areas to consider include →

- Keep escape routes clear and do not obstruct communal areas which are usually the escape route for the block
- Never prop a fire door open
- Do not use landings as storage or place personal items there – whilst the plant pot or mat outside your front door is lovely, it could cause serious issue if fire services were required to visit the site or indeed be the cause of a fire
- Do not store items such as prams, bicycles, or mobility scooters in common areas
- Never store flammable items in cupboards that have electrics in them
- Advise your Housing Officer or Customer Services ([customerservices@willowtreehousing.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@willowtreehousing.org.uk)) if you see items that have been left in communal areas, so that we can speak to the owner or arrange for it to be removed
- Always place rubbish inside the bins - do not leave rubbish lying around in the refuse point



# E-BIKES AND E-SCOOTERS ADVICE FROM THE NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL

E-bikes and e-scooters are becoming increasingly popular. Most are powered by lithium-ion batteries, which can be charged in the home. The use of these batteries in a wide range of household products is becoming increasingly common.

## CHARGING

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging, and always unplug your charger when it's finished charging
- Ensure you have working smoke alarms
- Charge batteries whilst you are awake and alert so if a fire should occur you can respond quickly  
Don't leave batteries to charge while you are asleep or away from the home
- Always use the manufacturer approved charger for the product, and check for any signs of wear and tear or damage
- Do not cover chargers or battery packs when charging, as this could lead to overheating or even a fire
- Do not charge batteries or store your e-bike or e-scooter near combustible or flammable materials
- Do not overcharge your battery – check the manufacturer's instructions for charge times
- Do not overload socket outlets or use inappropriate extension leads (use uncoiled extensions and ensure the lead is suitably rated for what you are plugging in to it)
- In the event of an e-bike, e-scooter or lithium-ion battery fire – do not attempt to extinguish the fire. Get out, stay out, call 999

## STORAGE

- Avoid storing or charging e-bikes and e-scooters on escape routes or in communal areas of a multi occupied building. If there's a fire, it can affect people's ability to escape
- Store e-bikes and e-scooters and their batteries in a cool place. Avoid storing them in excessively hot or cold areas
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for the storage and maintenance of lithium-ion batteries if they are not going to be used for extended periods of time

## BUYING

- Buy e-bikes, e-scooters and chargers and batteries from reputable retailers
- Many fires involve counterfeit electrical goods. Items which don't meet British or European standards pose a huge fire risk and while genuine chargers (or battery packs) may cost more, it's not worth putting your life at risk and potentially destroying your home by buying a fake charger to save a few pounds
- Register your product with the manufacturer to validate any warranties – batteries are usually included in warranties. Registering makes it easier for manufacturers to contact you in the event of safety or recall information
- Check any products you have bought are not subject to a product recall. You can do this by checking [Electrical Safety First's website](#) or the [government website](#)

## DAMAGE AND DISPOSAL

- Batteries can be damaged by dropping them or crashing e-bikes or e-scooters. Where the battery is damaged, it can overheat and catch fire without warning. Check your battery regularly for any signs of damage and if you suspect it is damaged it should be replaced and should not be used or charged
- If you need to dispose of a damaged or end of life battery, don't dispose of it in your household waste or normal recycling. These batteries, when punctured or crushed, can cause fires in bin lorries, recycling and waste centres. Your e-bike or e-scooter manufacturer may offer a recycling service. Alternatively, check with your local authority for suitable battery recycling arrangements in your area



## COMPLIMENTS FOR CONTRACTORS

“I am extremely happy with my new kitchen and all of the work that has been completed in my home by MSB. If and when I have come across things or asked for something to be done, workers have been more than happy to carry this out.”

“He was very helpful and ran everything through with me, carried out some great work. I would like him back in my house the next time there is an issue.”



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**Devon Office**  
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PL1 3LF



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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