

Phoenix *Flyer*

A newsletter by residents for residents

 @phoenixtogether 




**Community Links
 is back on Saturday
 7 December**

Michael Tisdell joined our Board as a leasehold member in March 2019. He explains why everyone, tenant and leaseholder, should get involved.



When I bought my home, I only had a basic sense of how Phoenix worked. I have come to understand much more about Phoenix's resident-led model, and what that means for me as a resident.

As I found out more, I became more interested in being a part of it. I wanted to bring a leaseholder's perspective.

I first became involved as part of a working party overseeing major works on the Meadows Estate.

This wasn't only an eye-opening experience for me but one that benefitted both Phoenix and those of us affected by building works.

It sounds obvious but no one knows and understands what is going on in any given set of properties better than those living there.

When I saw an email from Phoenix asking for a leaseholder to join the Board, I wondered whether I had the skills and experience to do such a role.

However, we need to resist that doubt. We have some brilliant residents who play key roles in shaping Phoenix, but we need to keep finding and nurturing talent to keep the resident-led model healthy for the decades to come.

It is perhaps easy to miss sometimes how unique Phoenix's model of governance is: it puts great trust in the ability of our residents and our community to set the direction for the organisation as

a whole, and so it requires active participation from tenants and leaseholders to sustain itself.

I have felt personally a great deal of support from Phoenix staff and other Board members, and empowered to bring my own perspective and concerns to the table.

As an organisation, Phoenix recognises it needs to work on improving leaseholder satisfaction. This means developing relationships and communicating so we can build trust and mutual understanding.

This is as true of leaseholders as it is of tenants.

There are so many ways for all residents to get involved and have our say in how Phoenix is run. Let's make sure our priorities are Phoenix's priorities and engage constructively on what can be improved.

By working together, we can make sure all our voices are heard.

What's happening



New generation of resident leadership

Two new tenants have joined our Board after being elected at September's annual general meeting of resident shareholders.

Simon Barlow and Simone George will join the largest group on our Board - made up of residents - to help set the direction of Phoenix.

Simon said: "As a Phoenix resident for almost the entire life of the organisation, I've seen the area and our homes change for the better. I decided when I saw the vacancy for the Board that I wanted to ensure the uniqueness of Phoenix and its approach to supporting the community continues. I wanted to play an active part in this as this will only continue if we all play our part."

Carmen Simpson, our current Vice Chair, was also re-elected to the Board as a tenant member.



Phoenix as your landlord

Phoenix has been named as one of the UK's top landlords for the 5th time running.

This year, 24housing Magazine placed Phoenix in 8th place, noting our community's work to restore **the Fellowship**, empower residents to better understand their rights in our award winning **school of social housing**, and our work to cut residents' energy bills with our **Energy Champion**

However, we know we can - and need to - do better.

We want to hear residents' views on how we do that - and we thank the 300+ of you who attended

our Chat & Chips events for speaking to us. We're looking forward to welcoming more of you at **Community Links** on Saturday 7 December (information below).

We encourage everyone to view our annual report to find out how we're performing as your landlord, how that compares to previous years and other landlords, and to get involved.

Find out more by visiting www.bit.ly/PCHAnnualReport

News in numbers



Find out more about what's going on: www.bit.ly/EventsAtPhoenix

11

residents won a prize at this year's Phoenix in Bloom gardening competition.

395

residents attended our Chat & Chips events to give your views.

849

young people were involved in projects and events in 2018-19.

1110

people enjoyed fun in the sun at Summer Fun.



Events

Men Leading by Example

Saturday 16 November, 12-4pm

The Fellowship & Star

Join us for sports, talks and more as part of International Men's Day - and look out for our celebration of women in March.

Christmas Community Links

Saturday 7 December, 12-3pm

The Green Man

Santa Claus is coming to town! Join us for festive, free, family-friendly fun and to meet the Phoenix team (and some reindeer).

Taking pride in our community

Mary Heelan (right) has been gardening her whole life and has turned that passion into a way of fighting flytipping near her home.

After Phoenix cleared two bramble-covered flower beds that were a flytipping trouble spot next to her home, Mary was inspired to make a difference. In February, Mary decided that she would adopt the two small plots and turn them into the fantastic flower garden they are today.

“I thought that if the area looked beautiful that it would be respected,” said Mary. “It worked. Since I started planting, we haven’t had a single incident of flytipping.”

Mary’s family and neighbours have been helping too.

“My mum and sisters come around to help and my neighbours have been donating plants and money to help keep the bed going. It’s really brought us all together.”

Mary has plans to develop the plot even further.

“The bed used to be full of roses and I want to bring them back. I want everyone to smell the roses as they walk past. I’m also hoping for the bed to develop enough that I’ll be able to give cuttings to help other community gardens.”



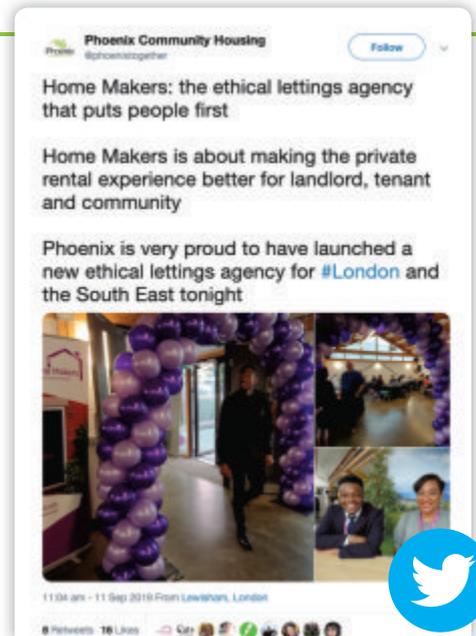
If you want to start your own community garden here are our top tips

- Don’t take too much on all at once. Build up steadily.
- Tell us where you’re planting so we don’t schedule any changes for that plot of land.
- Get your neighbours involved. They may be able to help with planting or donations.
- Take photos of the area as it is now - then you can enter next year’s ‘Most Improved’ category in Phoenix in Bloom!

Let’s get social!

Did you know you can find Phoenix on **Twitter** and **Instagram**?

Follow us [@phoenixtogether](#) for the latest news and info. Here are some of our most popular posts over the last couple of months...



When to call about a repair

Outside of our opening hours, we only carry out ‘Make safe’ repairs. These are emergency-only repairs that ensure your safety until we can fix things properly.

Please only report non-emergency repairs between 8am and 5pm. As it gets colder, we will make sure we carry out repairs to residents’ heating and hot water as our main priority.

Let’s take privacy seriously

At events we’ll always ask for your written permission to use photos or videos we may take of you, which you can withdraw at any time by contacting us. In the estates where we have CCTV, these are for the prevention and detection of crime, including flytipping, and your safety.

Please remember: don’t take photos or videos without people’s permission, and do get our permission before installing CCTV on your property.



Keep your home warm this winter...

As the colder nights set in, it's important to make sure you're ready for winter. If you haven't already, **check your boiler**. Make sure it's working - and, if it isn't, contact us now.

Staying on top of your energy bills can be difficult this time of the year as the heating comes on and there are things to buy for the holidays.



If you're worried about your energy bills - or even if you aren't but want to know how you can save more or be more environmentally friendly - visit our Energy Champion.

Sharon O'Connor is a Phoenix resident and an expert in keeping bills down and finding great deals on your energy. Last year, she helped residents save more than £31,000.

Our Energy Champion's advice is free for Phoenix residents and anyone else. So if you know someone who could use her help, please send them our way.

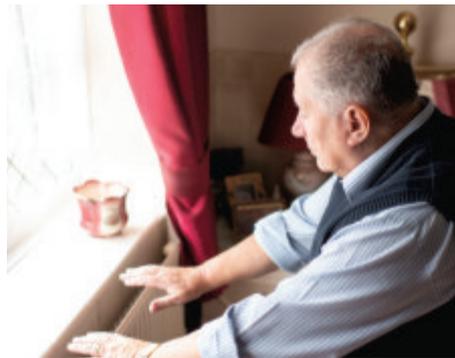
Every Wednesday until the end of March 2020.
10am - 1pm
The Green Man

...And dry too!

In winter, condensation can build-up in your home leading to damp and mould. This can damage your home and make you unwell.

However, there are lots of things you can do to beat the damp:

1. Keep windows open if someone's in.
2. Make sure large furniture isn't right up against the walls.
3. Reduce moisture by keeping lids on boiling pans of water.
4. If you have to dry your clothes inside, make sure windows are open. Don't put them on a



radiator as this can release about 5 litres (9 pints) of water into the air.

5. When you shower or take a bath, open the windows, close the door and turn on the extractor fan. Don't have an extractor fan in your kitchen or bathroom? Contact us and we'll fit one for you.

Changes to how you pay for water



From April 2020 tenants will pay water bills directly to Thames Water instead of paying it through rent to Phoenix. This means that while your rent charge will come down, you need to make sure that you pay for your water directly.

We and Thames Water will work with you to make this change as easy as possible. We will write to everyone this affects in November, and Thames Water will contact you to set up payments and see if you qualify for reduced charges.

Providing opportunities

We have welcomed six Lewisham College students to join us as part of the Project SEARCH programme.

Project SEARCH seeks to provide work experience opportunities and job skills for 16-25 year-olds with learning disabilities. In the UK, only around 6% of people with learning disabilities are employed - but for those who have gone through Project SEARCH, this rises to 66%.

The six students will work across our team for nine months, making us the first housing association in London to offer placements.

Please give them a warm welcome!



Supporting residents through welfare changes



We believe social housing isn't just a force for good, it's a necessity. For many people, housing association and council homes are the stable foundations on which they build lives where they can thrive.

It's important to us that anyone can afford to live in our homes. That's why our average social rents are among the lowest in Lewisham, why we're building new affordable

homes, and why we offer agreements to tenants and leaseholders to allow them to pay off arrears over a longer period of time.

And we're pleased that 85% of tenants said they were satisfied their rent was value for money (although only 36% of leaseholders said their service charge is too, and we want to work alongside leaseholders to improve that).

Our welfare benefits advisors are here to help residents who are either struggling to keep up with payments or who need a bit of support.

Last year, the residents our team helped gained an average of nearly £1,400 each. This will never apply to everyone - or even most residents - but it's important that anyone who might benefit contacts us to see if we can help.

Last year we helped residents claim benefits like Housing Benefit, Personal Independence Payments and other disability-related payments. We also supported residents to claim homeless prevention loans.

The team also organises workshops to help people improve their budgeting or savings knowledge. If you're interested, please contact us.

Our advisors are experts in welfare benefits and Universal Credit, and offer drop-in sessions at The Green Man and Jobcentre Plus Bromley. We also offer more in-depth sessions at The Green Man - or, if the resident is unable to get to the hub, at their home.

How changes to welfare are affecting residents

£101.66
a week

was the average Phoenix social rent last year.



505 households claiming Universal Credit by the end of August



303 households affected by the "bedroom tax" in 2018-19



17 households affected by the benefit cap in 2018-19



We helped residents claim grants or benefits worth **£601,000** last year



We made **291** referrals to the Citizens Advice Bureau, which we help fund

citizens advice

85% of tenants said they were satisfied with services for claiming housing or other welfare benefits



91% of tenants said they were satisfied with services to manage finances and paying rents



Staying safe over the holidays

The Christmas season can be a wonderful time to meet up with people and enjoy yourself.

However you're spending the break, it's important that you and your neighbours stay safe. Here are some of our tips:

- Don't plug too many things into one socket as this could create a fire risk.
- Be careful when cooking or with candles, especially if you're drinking alcohol.
- Keep fire doors closed, communal areas clear and keys in an accessible place. If a fire does start, this will help you to escape if that is the safest option.
- Test smoke alarms regularly and change batteries if needed.



Help us make Phoenix a better community for you!

Want to get involved? Call us and ask for Community Engagement.

Work with us to improve our community

If you've got a great idea to make our community a better place but need help to make it happen, get in touch. We can offer you **training, support and even funding to get your idea off the ground.**

We're also looking to hear from residents with specific experiences or backgrounds, to help us make a more inclusive community.

You could be helping us provide a more supportive **mental health** space for the community. Or making Lewisham a better place for **men and boys** or **people over 60 years old.**

Don't worry if you don't have time to attend meetings - we'd love to hear your views by phone or email. We can help cover transport or even childcare costs if you need it.

Our school of social housing is award-winning!
To register your interest for the Phoenix Academy, contact us.

Christmas opening hours

Christmas Day and Boxing Day:
Closed (Bank Holidays)

Friday 27 December:
10am-4pm

Monday 30 December:
10am-4pm

Tuesday 31 December:
10am-4pm

Wednesday 1 January:
Closed (Bank Holiday)

Thursday 2 January:
Office hours resume as normal

The Phoenix Repairs Service will carry out emergency repairs only during this time.



Wishing you all a Merry Christmas

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