

Better Together Newsletter

Dear Residents,

Welcome to the Summer edition of our resident newsletter which we hope will provide useful and interesting information for you.

At CDS, we're on a mission to help more people shape the things that matter to them at home and to create a sense of belonging in our communities.



During the pandemic and in the recent Jubilee celebrations, we saw just how powerful a community can be, with people coming together to help each other, look out for neighbours and friends, and to enjoy good times when they come. As we enter a challenging economic period, we need this sense of community more than ever.

We're trying hard to really hear what residents are telling us about our service so that we can be a better landlord, shaping our approach and our investment in line with your priorities. Over the last year we've radically improved our home safety in relation to electrical installations and fire safety. We have now set aside nearly £8m to invest in our homes and are prioritising heating as the thing residents most care about – making homes cheaper and easier to keep warm.

Over the coming year, we want to lean into our mission and our co-operative roots – collaborating with residents to see how we can give you more control over homes and services and through this, building a real sense of belonging in the place where you live.

We need your help to do this. You'll hear more from us as the year goes on – but please do share ideas and thoughts with us at any time – whether it's an idea about services that could be better managed locally or a simple change to a bin store or lighting that would help to make your block or estate feel more like home.

Finally, we're looking for people from all backgrounds and ages to help us on this journey. If you can spare a little time to get involved with one of our groups or are interested in joining our Board, please do feel free to call me or Hony Premlal, our Director of Operations on the usual number.

We wish you a happy, safe, and peaceful summer,

Linda Wallace
Chief Executive



3 TOP TIPS FOR SUMMER

1. Take care of your central heating system by switching it on for 15 minutes every few days. Central heating systems are designed to be switched on and off. If it's off for a long time, you may encounter issues in the winter.

2. Remember to close your windows and lock your doors. According to insurance company Aviva, two thirds of burglaries happen when people are at home. Leaving your windows open allows easy access for criminals.

3. Stay safe - don't use portable barbecues on your balcony. London Fire Brigade state that fires from barbecues on balconies can spread very easily. It's also anti-social. It's not surprising then that barbecues on balconies are a breach of your tenancy. Don't do it!



Let's Make It Better Campaign

To improve our connection with residents following the pandemic, we launched our Let's Make It Better Together campaign in March.

The team collaborated with residents to spread the message about the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. Between 3rd and 5th June some of our residents partnered with our CDS employees to organise various events to commemorate the occasion. We had a wonderful time! We want to express our gratitude to everyone who helped make the activities successful, including the organisers from each of our estates.

Communal gardening, estate parking and repairs were the key areas of concern we heard about during our "Meet & Greet" events. We want to assure you that we're currently working on solutions. To keep updated with our progress and latest news, be sure to check out our...

- ✓ [Website](#)
- ✓ [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)
- ✓ Letters and emails
- ✓ New bi-monthly Estate Customer e-bulletins (these provide more regular information and feedback to customers on each estate)

FRIENDLY REMINDERS!

Please let us know if you can't keep an appointment. Give us a call and we'll reschedule it for you. Our gas contractor organises appointments with residents but only 57% of the appointments are kept. This costs time and money which we could use for better services and means that other residents are disrupted.

Want to downsize?

Please tell us. We might have families who are in need of a bigger home. They'd be delighted to swap with you!

Please keep your garden tidy!

Untidy front and back gardens are a breach of your tenancy agreement. During the growing season, we often see an increase in reports of overgrown gardens and fly-tipping. Your housing officer will contact you if they notice any issues during their inspections.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

The Let's Make It Better Campaign is a great example of what we can achieve when we work together

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do, and to deliver the best service possible, it's vital that we work together. We invite you to...

- ✓ **Get involved with CDS Voice.** This is for anyone who wants to join a group of engaged customers and get involved in projects that matter to you. Contact Temi Awolaja at temi.awolaja@cds.coop or 0204 551 2992 to find out more.
- ✓ **Join the Responsive Repairs Task and Finish Panel.** Established in April, this panel meets twice a month to discuss how we can improve our repairs service. 15 people have joined so far. To participate, contact Hony Premlal at hony.premlal@cds.coop or on 0204 551 2961.
- ✓ **Become an Estate Champion.** Serve as our eyes and ears by communicating any concerns you have about neighbourhood problems to your Housing Officer. Let's work together and make your estates cleaner, safer, and better places to live! As an Estate Champion, every concern you share will be followed up on. This is a flexible role – participate as much or as little as you'd like. Contact your Housing Officer or Fola Agbaje at folagbaje@cds.coop or on 0204 551 2988 to get started.
- ✓ **Attend your monthly estate inspection.** Join your housing officer or leasehold advisor and share your feedback on the gardening, cleaning, and other services offered on the property. You can find the dates for these on the [CDS website](#).
- ✓ **Share your views about service delivery.** We recently changed some ground maintenance contractors that were failing to meet your expectations. Thank you for letting us know. We understand that our gardening and cleaning services are important to you, and we strive to consult with you about these wherever possible. Please do speak up if you have any concerns!

NEED FINANCIAL SUPPORT?

High inflation rates, soaring energy bills, and rising food costs are affecting our incomes more than ever before. If you need support during the cost of living crisis, here are some of the ways we can help.



CDS Hardship Fund

We have some one-time grants on offer to residents who are seriously struggling to pay their utility bills or other priority debts. You don't need to pay us back. To be eligible to make an application, you must:

- Be a current resident in a CDS home
- Undertake an income and budget assessment with a member of the CDS team
- If in arrears of more than eight weeks, have an arrears payment plan in place and have maintained this for eight weeks before the application
- Not have any outstanding cases of serious anti-social behaviour
- Provide specific evidence to support claims for utility costs, priority debts and any purchases

To request an application, you can either speak to your Housing Officer who will pass on a referral, or call our Welfare Benefits Advisor, Maureen Bello, on 020 4551 2936 / 07818 017 830 or email her at maureen.bello@cds.coop.

Energy Hardship Fund

We're always here to offer help and advice if you're worried about your energy bills. We understand you may be concerned right now. If you have a pre-payment meter and are struggling to pay your utility bills, you might be eligible for a voucher from the Energy Hardship Fund. For more information, speak to your Housing Officer or call our Welfare Benefits Advisor, Maureen Bello, on 020 4551 2936 / 07818 017 830 or email her at maureen.bello@cds.coop.

Free Welfare Benefits, Money & Budgeting Service

If your financial situation is stressing you out, come and get some free personalised advice. We're here to help, so please don't suffer in silence.

We can support you with:

- ✓ Benefit entitlement checks, including household members, advice on whether to claim universal credit or remain on current benefits and assistance to submit a claim if required
- ✓ Advice and assistance with claiming all other benefits and help with completing forms (i.e. PIP, DLA, UC50, ESA50, council tax reduction, etc.), challenging decisions and representation at appeal tribunal hearings
- ✓ Assistance with applying for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help with rent arrears and shortfalls
- ✓ Grant applications for white goods, furniture, supermarket and utility vouchers

How We Fund Work to Homes

All our funds come from rents and as these are much lower than market rents, we have to be careful about how we spend money to make it last for all customers. Here are our key priorities when making decisions:

Safe. We have specific legal obligations as a landlord to make sure your home or the block that you live in are safe. This includes things like fire safety, gas and electrical installations.

Decent. As a social landlord we need to meet the Decent Homes Standard. We do not replace things just because they are old, but take a balance of age and condition to make decisions.

Comfortable. We try to take into account the things that matter most to you at home as well as the things we have to do. This includes things like adaptations if you have physical needs, improving environmental efficiency and protecting green spaces.

Household Support Fund

Each local authority has various funds available for people struggling financially, and you don't have to be receiving benefits to apply. Contact your local council to find out more.

Warm Home Discount

Don't forget to contact your electricity supplier to find out when their warm home discount scheme opens this year. You may be eligible for extra help, but you need to apply as schemes are only open for a short period.

Food Banks

To find a food bank near you, visit trusselltrust.org.

Turn2Us

Turn2Us offer a benefits calculator, grants search, a free helpline and more. Visit their website at turn2us.org.uk.

DWP Pension Credit Take Up Campaign

It's estimated that up to £1.7bn of pension credits are left unclaimed. To help with this, the government is encouraging pensioners to check what they're entitled to. Even if you're receiving a state and private pension or have savings, it's worth contacting them on 0800 99 1234.

Cost of Living Payment

Over 8 million households will receive cash payments from July 2022 to ease cost of living pressures. If you're eligible, you'll be paid automatically in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits - you don't need to apply. Find the details at gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment. Other helpful resources include:

- ✓ **National Debtline** www.nationaldebtline.org (0808 808 4000)
- ✓ **Stepchange** www.stepchange.org (0800 138 1111)
- ✓ **Debt Advice Foundation** www.debtadvicefoundation.org (0800 622 6151)
- ✓ **Christians Against Poverty** www.capuk.org (0800 328 0006)
- ✓ **Youth Legal & Resource Centre** www.youthlegal.org.uk (0203 195 1906)
- ✓ **Money Helper** www.moneyhelper.org.uk (0800 011 3797)

GET TO KNOW US

Compliance Team

Kristell Marcantoni. Kristell has been with us for four years and became our Compliance Team Leader in April. She tells us that she loves her job!

Cathy Aldridge. Cathy has a wealth of experience in gas compliance and has been with us for almost two years. She appreciates the welcoming environment at CDS and loves interacting with both her customers and co-workers.

Mandy Kang. Mandy does a great job at managing our safety compliance responsibilities, including things like electrical safety, water hygiene, and fire safety, among others. She says she really appreciates the effort CDS makes to be a multicultural organisation.

Housing Services Team

We made some changes to our Housing Services Team at the start of the year as part of our continued efforts to deliver first-rate customer service.

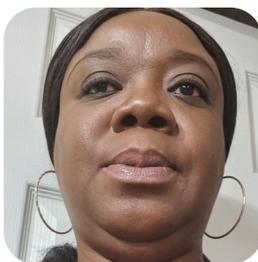


Temi Awolaja is our new Head of Housing Services. Previously our Housing Service Manager, Temi is dedicated to our mission of becoming a truly customer-driven organisation.

Providing support to Temi is **Folake Agbaje**. Folake has over 20 years' experience in the housing industry and is committed to putting the needs of the customer first.

Naomi Robinson joined us in April as our part-time Income Manager. With more than 20 years' experience in social housing, Naomi has a lot of knowledge about financial issues. She's committed to giving customers first-class service and will keep tenancy sustainability at the heart of everything she does.

On June 13th, we said goodbye to Daniel Hicklin, our Leasehold Services Advisor, who has now moved onto other opportunities. Our interim Leasehold Advisor, **Jennifer Nelson-Twakor**, can be reached at jennifer.nelson-twakor@cds.coop or on 020 4551 2958.



Folake Agbaje



Naomi Robinson



Jennifer Nelson-Twakor

Responsive Repairs Team

Dave and the team are always trying to get repairs done quickly and effectively for customers but the job can be challenging! Please be kind to them - they are here to help you!

Our Repairs Advisors are:

Viv Sweeney-Collins. Viv has been with us for 13 years, so she's extremely knowledgeable!

Oletha Corbo. Originally from Cape Town, South Africa, Oletha joined us in February. Oletha previously worked at another housing organisation and loves to connecting with customers.

Anesa Walker. Anesa joined us in March with more than 10 years' expertise in the housing sector. (Warning: Anesa's enthusiasm is infectious!)

Bev Frimpong. Bev has been employed in the housing industry since graduating from college in 2016. She loves talking to customers and always strives to go above and beyond to help.



Oletha Corbo



Anesa Walker



Bev Frimpong



A Note From the Repairs Team

We always try to carry out repairs quickly and efficiently. The more information you can give, the more effective we can be. Texting or emailing a picture of the issue is really helpful. We aim to carry out repairs based on their urgency:

Emergency Repairs represent immediate or imminent danger to life or to property, for example, a serious leak, dangerous electrical fault, or an unstable wall. We aim to address emergency repairs in no more than **24 hours**. Our priority will be to make the situation safe so that we have time to resolve the underlying issue without anyone being at risk.

Urgent Repairs create significant and constant discomfort or inconvenience for residents. For example, a persistent small leak, a broken tap, or a failure of your heating system during the summer months. We aim to do these repairs in no more than **7 days**.

Routine Repairs cause inconvenience but aren't dangerous (e.g., a broken external light where there's lots of other common area lights). We aim to address these within **28 days**.

For all repairs, we'll take into account any vulnerability, such as being elderly or disabled or having very young children, so do tell us if this applies to you. See our full repairs policy on our [website](#).