

AUTUMN 2022

# HOME NEWS

Hexagon



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# WELCOME FROM OUR NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## 'SHERON CARTER SAYS'

*Welcome to the first installment of 'Sheron Carter Says', a new regular column from our Chief Executive who began post earlier this year. Here, Sheron will look more closely at different aspects of our social housing service.*



*Sheron Carter, our new Chief Executive, looks more in depth at a key option helping residents move to the home of their choice.*

A distinct early morning chill is in the air, signaling the end of our long hot summer. Many of us are snuggling in at home more often, but this can be a difficult time for some residents.

Next to repairs, wanting to move is the most common enquiry that I receive from our local MPs. Understandably there is immense frustration.

As a regulated social landlord, we must abide by the standards set by the regulator. The Tenancy Standard obliges us to support local authorities to meet local housing needs and to fulfil obligations in nominations agreements. This includes making use of common housing registers, common allocations policies and local lettings policies.

The principle is that Common Housing Registers ensure that all people in housing need in a local authority area have fair consideration for social housing vacancies. We have signed up to the Common Housing Register in the local authority areas where we operate.

We can only let a very small number of homes to transfer applicants for two reasons:

- a) 100% of our vacant homes are let via the Common Housing Register in Lewisham and 75% in all other areas
- b) We do not get many vacancies

In the six months from April to September 2022, we received just 33 vacant homes. Most of these (19 homes) were in Lewisham. Of the remaining 14, ten would be let via Common Housing Registers. This left just four homes that we could let to tenants on our transfer list. In the same period we completed 13 mutual exchange home-swaps. A higher number of tenants will secure a move through mutual exchange which is why we encourage tenants to sign up. **If you would like to consider this as an option, please read more on pages 4 – 5.**

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# HELP WITH RENT ARREARS

Hexagon as an organisation are fully aware of the impact that the cost of living crisis is having for all of our residents. In some cases this can lead to a reduced ability to pay rent and other household bills.

**Hexagon rely on our income from our rental charges to allow us to improve our standard of properties and estates for all of our residents.**

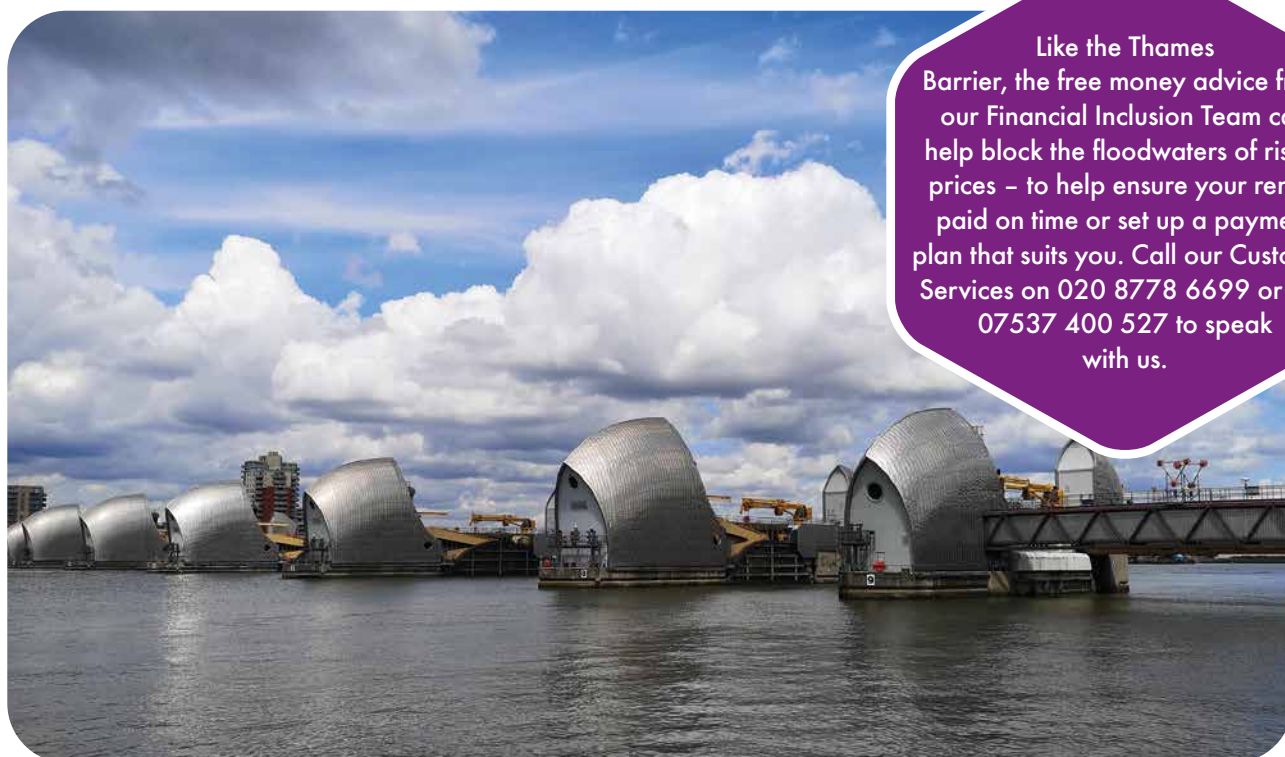
## Why the rise in rent?

In line with Government regulations for the setting of rent, this year we will be increasing your rent by 4.1%. We've also taken the difficult decision to apply an increase to the service charges. Previously we've subsidised the service charge costs we've passed on, but external pressures such as the rise in interest rates, fuel costs and our commitment to property safety mean we've now set our service charges at a level that more accurately reflects the cost of us providing the services you receive.

**We are always looking at ways in which we can help and support those residents who are struggling to make ends meet. The**

**best way for us to help you, our residents, begins with communication – please speak to us so we are aware of your situation and can therefore be more helpful in finding a solution that works for you.**

We have internal support being provided by our Financial Inclusion Team (see Community Investment pages 6 – 10) for both debt and benefit advice. We have a Customer Accounts Team who can assist in discussing any rent payment issues you are facing and set (or renegotiate) payment plans that are suitable to help reduce and ultimately clear any rent arrears you have with us.



Like the Thames Barrier, the free money advice from our Financial Inclusion Team can help block the floodwaters of rising prices – to help ensure your rent is paid on time or set up a payment plan that suits you. Call our Customer Services on 020 8778 6699 or text 07537 400 527 to speak with us.

# HOMESWAPPING

The fastest way to move home within social housing.

Swapping your home with another resident (known as a mutual exchange) is often the quickest way to find alternative accommodation. It offers you more choice over the type and location of your new home than a housing transfer.

## What is a mutual exchange?

Move home by swapping your residence for one someone else is currently living in, either in a two way swap or a multi-swap involving three or more households.

## Who can mutual exchange?

Only assured, secure tenants have the right to exchange, so check your tenancy agreement for confirmation. If you are eligible, you can swap with anyone living in council or housing association accommodation anywhere in the UK – subject to approval from both landlords. (See Refusals)

## Why a mutual exchange?

Transferring to another home within Hexagon's stock can be very difficult unless you have a very high priority or need to downsize. A mutual exchange is often the swiftest pathway for tenants who want to move.

## How do I do it?

To arrange a mutual exchange, you'll need to find someone who wants to swap with you. You can find potential exchange partners by registering for free on the following websites, which guide you on how to complete the online application.

HomeSwapper:

**[www.homeswapper.co.uk/](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk/)**

House Exchange: **[www.houseexchange.org.uk/](http://www.houseexchange.org.uk/)**

Feeling overcrowded? Or perhaps you just like to imagine, 'What would my ideal home look like?'

Maybe you hope to move to find a home with a garden, or to be closer to family, work, or different amenities?

**DREAM BIG:** Perhaps you want access to a specific sports activity not available in your current area?





To be successful finding a swap partner, be sure to upload plenty of photos showing your home. Make sure the photos show a tidy space. Ask yourself the question, 'Does this look appealing?'

## How long will it take?

Once you have found someone who wants to swap with you, please submit a "Permission to Exchange Form" which you can request from our Customer Services Team, by email or phone. Once we've received your form, we will check the details then send all exchange partners an "Application to Exchange" form.

We will either approve or refuse within 42 days of receiving all the completed forms plus the required documents, from all the exchange partners wanting to swap with each other. During the 42 days, we will contact you to carry out an inspection of your current home, and verify the details of the person you want to exchange with. If there are repairs that you are responsible for, our surveyors will tell you what needs to be done. The exchange will not be able to proceed until you have carried out these repairs.

## Refusals

Hexagon or other landlords can refuse your request if you, or the tenants you're swapping with:

- Are a Starter Tenant
- Have been given a notice seeking possession
- Have been served a possession order
- Are moving into a property that is too big (the accommodation is substantially larger than is reasonable required by the occupant) or too small or doesn't meet your needs
- Are moving into a property reserved for older people or for people with mobility needs, and you don't meet these criteria
- Have paid money to any other party to exchange

## Challenge a decision

If your request to swap houses is refused, you have the right to appeal against the decision. You can submit an appeal by writing to us.

## EDITOR'S HOMESWAPPING STORY

### Perseverance is key

Are you living in overcrowded conditions? Or perhaps you live too far from your place of work, your family or partner? Maybe you just desire a change of environment? In the past financial year 12 Hexagon residents moved via Homeswapper and five via House Exchange, three via Facebook and two via word-of-mouth.

In 2014 I moved to my current home in South East London from West Dorest, using Homeswapper.

To be successful, I included lots of information about my property, listing all its merits (eg transport links, local amenities etc), plus plenty of clear photos. I had up to a dozen enquiries per day – these take time to answer. I made sure my house was tidy in the photos and whenever I showed a prospective swap partner around it. Remember also, it will take time and expense for you to view any homes you're interested in.

After five years – including two multi-swaps which collapsed at the final hurdle – I was part of a successful 5-way swap.

### Any more questions?

Please contact the **Neighbourhood Team** who will be able to assist.

Telephone: **020 8778 6699**

Email: [housingservices@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:housingservices@hexagon.org.uk)

# HELP WITH HOUSEHOLD ENERGY BILLS



Are you struggling to pay your energy bills? Help is available – So don't be afraid to ask for help!

Check what you are entitled to, with a quick and easy benefits calculator, it will take around 20 minutes: [www.betteroffcalculator.co.uk/calculator/new/step1](http://www.betteroffcalculator.co.uk/calculator/new/step1)

- Are you entitled to the Warm Home Discount Scheme? With this scheme you may be entitled to £150 off electricity bills, or a voucher for the same amount for a prepayment meter. You will have to check with your supplier to see if they participate in the scheme and the criteria they have set
- Were you born after 26th of September 1955? Check if you are eligible for the winter fuel payment at: [www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment](http://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment)
- Are you on a prepayment meter? Then Fuel Banks may be able to supply you with vouchers to help pay the payment meter. First you must be referred by one of their partners, find the full list here: [www.fuelbankfoundation.org/our-partners/](http://www.fuelbankfoundation.org/our-partners/)
- If you have debt with your energy company, talk with your supplier to discuss payment plans and check if they have any grants available to help clear your energy debt. Not all suppliers have them. Here are a few providers who offer grants to customers (at time of writing this article):  
**EDF Energy** Customer Support Fund  
**British Gas Energy** Support Fund  
**E.ON** Energy Fund  
**Octopus** Octo Assist Fund
- If your debts are becoming an issue and affecting your well-being, contact a debt specialist for FREE advice such as:  
 Step Change **0800 138 1111** or  
 National Debt Line **0808 808 4000**

## Green Doctor Referral

Looking for support on fuel poverty? Try Green Doctor Referral! You can self-refer, or contact Hexagon's Money Support Team (email: [moneysupport@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:moneysupport@hexagon.org.uk) or call **020 8768 6699**) to request we make a referral on your behalf.

Find Green Doctor London at [www.groundwork.secure.force.com/enquiry/](http://www.groundwork.secure.force.com/enquiry/) or call them on **0300 365 3005**

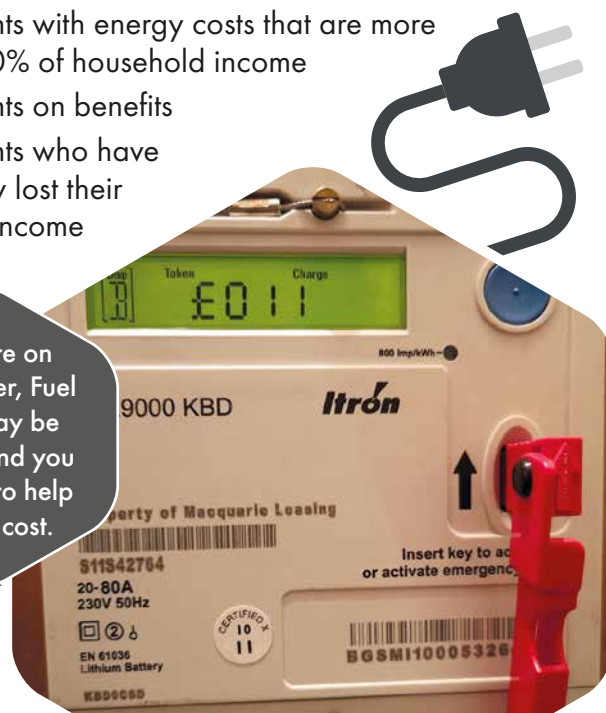
## What help can Green Doctor Referral offer?

They have 15 years' experience with energy advice, offering great tips on a room-to-room basis about how to save energy. Plus they will answer questions around energy bills, heating systems and even signpost you to other services.

## Who is eligible for Green Doctor Referral?

- Residents who have disabilities or long-term health conditions
- Residents who are pregnant
- Residents with children under 10 years
- Residents who have low income (below £16,190 annually)
- Residents with energy costs that are more than 10% of household income
- Residents on benefits
- Residents who have recently lost their job or income

If you are on a key meter, Fuel Banks may be able to send you vouchers to help with the cost.





**RESISTANCE  
IS NOT FUTILE!**  
Do rising energy prices  
mean the world's' end?  
Not if you read and  
follow our top tips!



## Help with Thames Water bills

### WaterHelp Scheme

If your household income is below £20,111, you could be entitled to a 50% discount on your whole bill. To find out more visit:

[www.thameswater.co.uk/help/account-and-billing/financial-support/waterhelp](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/account-and-billing/financial-support/waterhelp)

### WaterSure

Do you have a water meter, but find bills hard to pay because you have a large family or medical condition that depends on water? You may be eligible for WaterSure where your water bill can be capped. For more info visit:

[www.thameswater.co.uk/help/account-and-billing/financial-support/waterhelp](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/account-and-billing/financial-support/waterhelp)



## Citizens Advice

May be able to help you with a number of issues including:

- help with cost of living
- checking if you are entitled to discounts to council tax
- applying for grants and benefits
- referral to foodbanks

Some local locations for Citizens' Advice are:

- Lewisham: Leamore Community Hub Bonfield Road SE13 5EU  
[www.citizensadvicelewisham.org.uk/](http://www.citizensadvicelewisham.org.uk/)  
**0800 231 5453**
- Southwark: 8 Market Place Southwark Park Road – SE16 3UQ  
[www.citizensadviceSouthwark.org.uk/](http://www.citizensadviceSouthwark.org.uk/)  
**080 8278 7849**
- Croydon: 48 – 50 Portland Road South Norwood, SE25 4PQ  
[www.citizensadviceCroydon.org/](http://www.citizensadviceCroydon.org/)  
**0300 330 9095**
- Greenwich: Old Town Hall Polytechnic Street SE18 6PN  
[www.greenwichcab.org.uk/](http://www.greenwichcab.org.uk/)  
**080 8278 7965**
- Bexley: 42 Pier Road ERITH Kent DA8 1TA  
[www.bexleycab.org.uk/](http://www.bexleycab.org.uk/)  
**0808 2505709**

## Help from borough councils

Each borough has an array of advice services offering free support, such as housing advice, specialist debt advice, benefit advice, well-being or access to Social Supermarkets and pantries.



For any further information, please email Hexagon at: [moneysupport@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:moneysupport@hexagon.org.uk) or call **020 8768 6699** and ask for a list of services in your area.

# ONLINE LIFE

It is a fact of modern life that most services are online – accessing them digitally can be convenient, saving you time and money. But getting online can be difficult if you don't have the skills or resources to do so.

Hexagon offers free digital training to residents through our Digital Champions – skilled residents paid to provide support to help other residents like you get online to improve your digital skills.

## Support includes:

- Setting up an email
- Setting up online banking
- Setting up online shopping
- Using Zoom
- Learning how to use your Universal Credit account.
- Learning how to access and use a range of online services e.g. Patient Access to book a GP appointment or council services to set up a council tax account
- Access to digital equipment to do your training where needed

If you would like to improve your digital skills or would like more information, please contact Leanne Cairney on 020 8768 9019 or email: [lcairney@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:lcairney@hexagon.org.uk)

Leanne Cairney, Money Support Advisor  
Photo supplied by Hexagon

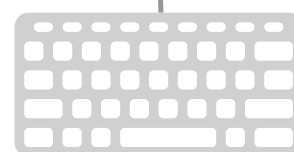
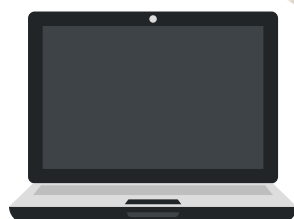
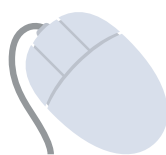
## DIGITAL SUPPORT CASE STUDY

Resident Mrs Spencer has accessed our Digital Skills Training to receive support from our Digital Champion Hannah Ajibade.

Mrs Spencer initially engaged with the Employment and Skills Team because she was looking for work. It became apparent that improving her digital skills would help her search for work and apply for jobs online.

Mrs Spencer didn't have a laptop, so Hexagon loaned her one and Hannah showed her how to set this up. During the sessions, she was shown a variety of things including using Zoom and utilised opportunities to practice what she learnt. This training helped her to find a job – she now works as a mental health support worker and has returned to further education.

Mrs Spencer said, **"I've learnt how to send an email and complete applications forms online. I've been able to go back to university to finish my degree in International Business Management. Knowing how to use Zoom means I'm able to do the online classes. I feel more confident now in using IT."**





# SKILLS ACADEMY



Would you like to learn something new? Develop your skills? Get a certificate?

Skills Academy is an online training platform offering a range of free courses for Hexagon residents. The great thing about these courses is you can do them at your own pace at any time of the day.

The platform is very simple to use, and you can do as many courses as you like, there are no limits to your learning.

A lot of Skills Academy's courses will help you develop skills to improve your employability and aid career progression. Examples include:

- Microsoft Excel Certification at Levels 1, 2 and 3
- Microsoft Mail Merge Certification
- Microsoft Outlook Certification Level 3
- Microsoft Word Certification Level 3
- Microsoft Teams Certification

Other courses on offer include:

- Sage 50 Certification Levels 1, 2 and 3
- Basic English Certification
- Basic Maths Certification
- Call Centre Certification
- Business Plan Writing Certification
- Building Your Confidence and Self Esteem Certification
- Business Administration Certification
- Customer Services Certification Level 3
- Essential Employment Skills Certification
- Teaching Assistant Certification Level 2
- Transport Management Certification Level 2
- Food Safety Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4

Free self-employment and business support

Have you been thinking about starting your own business but you're not sure how to start? Or maybe you've already started a business but it has stalled, and you're not sure what you can do to address this? Hexagon may be able to help you.

We are offering residents a range of free self-employment and business support, which includes:

- A 1.5 hour online information session on business start-up
- An online business course covering business start-up, marketing and developing a website (3 sessions totalling 7 hours)
- Signposting to further business support e.g. local authority provision
- Access to 1-1 business coaching once at least one of the above options has been completed



Martyne Callender, Senior Employment Advisor.

Photo supplied by Hexagon

Contact Martyne Callender on [mcallender@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:mcallender@hexagon.org.uk) or call 020 8768 7915 for more information.



# UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Government will be writing to those still on legacy benefits saying they have to claim Universal Credit and their legacy benefits will stop after a while.

The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) have said that the migration exercise is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2024. Before claiming Universal Credit, you may need to change how you manage your money.

## Claim Online

You will be expected to claim Universal Credit online. Are you someone who will struggle with an online claim? Whilst telephone claims can be made in some cases, most claims will be online. Our Digital Champions can help people get online and have free courses in IT skills.

## Account for payment

To get Universal Credit, you will need a bank or building society current account, or a credit union account. The account must allow you to make and receive automated payments. If you do not have a suitable account, you can think about opening a basic bank account that offers automated payments.

### Paying rent to your landlord

Your Universal Credit payment will include help with rent and some service charges if you are entitled to this. You will then have to pay it to your landlord yourself.

Paying the rent will have to be a priority each month. Find out about managing your rent whilst claiming Universal Credit payments here:

[www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/uc-rent](http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/uc-rent)

Some say "Life is your oyster", but if you're trying hard yet still need a safety net to keep you going, our Community Investment Team are here to help.



## Budgeting on monthly payments

You will be paid Universal Credit once a month and will have to pay bills and expenses – including rent – out of the money you receive. So before claiming Universal Credit, it is helpful to think about how to plan your budget around it. You can use The Money Advice Service's Online Budget Planning Tool to manage your money: [www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk](http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk)

## One payment

If you have a partner you are wishing to include in your Universal Credit claim, there will be one payment for you and your partner – so both of you will have to decide which account to have the money paid into.

If there are other adults living in the same household who are also claiming Universal Credit, they will be paid separately.



# POET RISES TO COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Sylvie (Lewisham) is on our Love London Working Active Inclusion project facilitated by our Community Investment Team. Sylvie has accessed an acting course, CV development, job applications workshop, advice and guidance. She lives in a Hexagon Supported Housing flat.

After writing poetry for a number of years, she now has a publisher and is working on a book to be published next year. Below, Sylvie shares one of her poems with Home News readers, and some thoughts about her time as a homeless person.

"I experienced homelessness twice, both the end of unhealthy relationships. The first time, I ended up in women's refuge. It wasn't a pleasant place. The second time was in a "last minute, before I move in" break up. I was placed in a care setting for single, homeless individuals with mental illnesses. It was horrible."

Losing your home is deeply traumatizing, even if you have a "roof" over your head. Life can change in a minute, for the worse, for reasons out of our control."

I am a writer and a passionate mental health and child abuse activist on Winter Turns into Spring: [www.winterturnsintospring.co.uk](http://www.winterturnsintospring.co.uk)  
And a poet: The Blossoming Lotus: [www.instagram.com/the\\_blossoming\\_lotus\\_](https://www.instagram.com/the_blossoming_lotus_)  
I am also a guest blogger for the CPTSD Foundation."

**Sylvie**

Photo supplied by Sylvie

## Welcome home, my dear

Close the door behind you, my dear.  
You don't have to deal with the world anymore.  
You can relax now, my dear.  
Kick your shoes off  
And put the kettle on.  
Grab a blanket, my dear:  
You don't have to feel the cold anymore.  
Take a deep breath, let the tension go, my dear:  
This is your space; you are safe here.  
Rejoice, my dear:  
After losing a roof,  
You have finally found a Home.

\*



Thank you to resident Sylvie (Lewisham) who shares one of her poems with Home News readers, and some thoughts about her time as a homeless person.





# RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER ELECTION RESULTS

Home News thanks all residents who stepped forward as candidates for the Resident Board Member elections. Taking a place on the Board is a highly effective way to help influence the direction of Hexagon policy and its implementation for the benefit of all residents.

We also thank all residents who took part in the elections by casting your votes.

There were two places available for residents on the Hexagon Housing Association Board in the 2022 election. The graph below shows the results of the vote. The total number of votes cast was 294.

Mark Allan and Tom Heyes are elected onto the Board, and will work to represent the best interests of all residents. Congratulations to you both! You can read their election statements below.



## Mark Allan's Election Statement

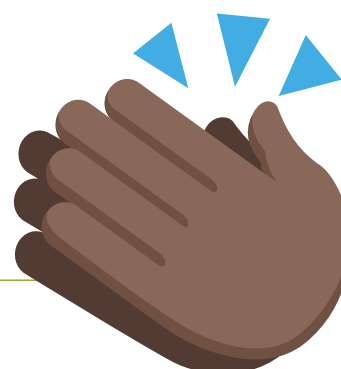
I am standing again for the Hexagon Board because I believe that continuity is needed at this time of change and challenge. As a Hexagon tenant for 20 years and a Resident Board Member for six years, I have developed the skills, experience and confidence to engage with fellow residents, staff and Board, to improve services to all residents, whether tenants or leaseholders.

The challenges we face are unprecedented: inflation, fire safety works, moving to net zero carbon, creating secure, quality homes for people who are priced out of the market. I believe these challenges can be met through effective teamwork, with the voice of residents at the front and centre of the decision making process.

I have worked for 10 years in resident involvement in social housing and am an active member of a housing co-op, managing homes that belong to Hexagon, including mine.

Residents are telling Hexagon that it needs to improve its repairs service, communications with residents and response to complaints. I am actively working for these improvements, including as Chair of Hexagon's Performance Management Committee.

I am strongly committed to diversity and equal opportunities. If elected, I will continue to work with the representative bodies for Hexagon residents, and the housing co-ops who manage Hexagon homes. With a new Chief Executive arriving, and many changes of Board members currently, I would like to serve as both a point of continuity and a strong voice for residents in these times of challenge and change.





### Tom Heyes' Election Statement

I will fight for affordable rents and low service charges for all Hexagon residents. If elected, I'll be trying to keep down any rent increases. We are in a cost of living crisis. Incomes have stalled but our bills have rocketed. We face potential rent increases of up to 10% or more. Hexagon's mission must be to deliver affordable housing and, if rents are increased by unaffordable amounts, it'll be failing its core objectives.

As an organisation, Hexagon faces these same inflationary challenges. The organisation must be financially secure if it is to keep running, but it does not need to pass on macroeconomic pressures to us. I've been a Hexagon resident for over a decade and know that, if it is to deliver for us, Hexagon needs to innovate and must do more with less.

I have a track record of challenging established ways of thinking and delivering successful change – in my professional life I advise large companies on diversity and workplace legal issues. I will bring these skills to the Board for the benefit of all residents.

Please put your trust in me.

Stephen Mills (SE16) was the winner of the £50 Draw Winner in the Resident Board Member Elections. Congratulations Oscar!



Aramide Ogunlana	56
Ayam Asuleman	38
Mark Allan	123
Tom Heyes	95
Richard Bradshaw	54
Pauline Aweto	61
Oritseetemi Maria Otubu	42



# THE BIG CONVERSATION

During the first two weeks of September, 140 Hexagon staff knocked on over 2,000 residents' doors to say hello and catch up after the pandemic. This even included staff who usually never leave the office for work, such as the Finance and IT Teams who can be more at ease with spreadsheets than people!



Val from the Resident Voice & Engagement Team speaking to one of the many residents we met at The Big Conversation.

We spoke to over 1,000 residents who were in when we called. We will report what you told us and what we've changed as a result of that feedback in the next edition of Home News.

Meanwhile, the Resident Voice & Engagement Team and Community Investment Team spent almost every afternoon and evening at seven estates talking to residents and providing some children's activities.

Staff members explained the government's expectations of us to ensure all of your homes meet net zero carbon targets. Children made bird houses, bird feeders and planted seeds as part of Hexagon's environmental sustainability awareness campaign.



Children's activities.

We were joined by our new repairs contractors Gilmartins, who fixed communal lights and did many other repairs on the spot.

Photos on this page supplied by Hexagon.

The Big Conversation  
Hexagon  
We're listening!



Hexagon's new Chief Executive Sharon Carter listening to a resident over tea in Croydon.

Sharon Carter, Hexagon's new Chief Executive came with us for three days and had tea with residents. She discussed fire safety, anti-social behaviour, repairs and stock improvement with around 30 residents.

Over 100 residents visited our events – sometimes in the rain. So whether it was meeting residents on doorsteps or at our events, staff enjoyed hearing what you like about Hexagon and your home, or learning where we can improve.

Please watch out for the Winter 2023 edition of Home News for more details on what we did as a result of this great feedback.



One of the forecourts where The Big Conversation attended with information stalls and speakers.



Gilmartins Operative, Franklin, fixing some communal lights in Croydon.



# GET INVOLVED!

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

### Readers' Panel

This group meets four times a year to review what you like about Home News magazine. This panel offers guidance both on design features and story ideas.

### Residents' Inspection

Residents' Inspections are an example of scrutiny. During an inspection, residents review in detail how well a particular service is delivered to our tenants. Residents make recommendations for improvements, which are reported to directors so that action plans can be put in place.

### Performance Review Group

This group is a panel of residents who meet four times a year to scrutinise the performance of the housing service. Recommendations are made to the Board on where and how improvements need to be made.

### Repairs Group

The Repairs Group meet every three months to scrutinise, challenge and improve performance and value for money in the Responsive Repairs service on behalf of Hexagon residents. The group focuses primarily on contractor performance.

AND LOTS MORE!!

### Contact us to make a difference!

To get involved or find out more about these and other activities, please email us at: [getinvolved@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@hexagon.org.uk) or telephone: 020 8778 6699 and ask for the Resident Voice & Engagement Team.

"Looking back now I am surprised I was a housing association tenant for two decades before I became actively involved. Hexagon have been praised for our high level of resident involvement, meaning there are lots of different ways where YOU as a resident can have your say about the operations of your landlord. So, why not branch out and try a new experience by involving yourself more in your housing community? As a social landlord, Hexagon value your input. To help improve Hexagon's services – take a look at the list and see what appeals to you."

**Adrian Beckingham, Home News Editor and Hexagon Resident.**

Adrian is a Hexagon resident living in Lewisham, who first approached us to help volunteer with improving Home News. He was then invited to apply for the post of Communications Officer, which he successfully won, with a key part of this role being Editor-In-Chief of Home News. Why don't you approach us too and see how you can use your experience as a resident to help improve Hexagon's services?



## SUSTAINABILITY COMPETITION WINNER

We asked the question: 'What is the single most important thing you can do as a resident, to play your role in Hexagon's pathway to zero carbon?'

Congratulations to Nicole Garrett (SE18) who won a £20 shopping voucher with her answer, "Join Hexagon's Greener Homes Challenge to make a difference and assist."

# RESIDENT ADVISORY GROUP



Resident 'Seyi' (Southwark) writes below about her experiences as a Member of RAG (Resident Advisory Group).

We made a decision at RAG to send an observer to Board meetings. We also have Resident Board Member Denny Senner – perhaps best known to Home News readers as the author of our gardening page 'Denny's Digs' – attend our meetings as an observer.

I volunteered to be the RAG observer at the Board Meeting in July. RAG had made two recommendations which Denny was going to present to the Board.

I was a bit nervous so the helpful and encouraging Jane Eyles, Resident Voice & Engagement Lead, arranged for the friendly and gardener-extraordinaire Denny to meet me downstairs and take me up to the meeting. This made it less daunting.

On the day, I arrived in plenty of time and went upstairs with Denny as arranged. We were a bit early and met Rebecca Outram and Charles Mtakati (Hexagon Directors) whilst waiting in the kitchen. It was good to meet both of them in person as we had only previously met on Zoom. They both assured me that there was no need to be nervous and that they were all quite human!

On entering the Boardroom, I was introduced to everyone. It was lovely to meet Sheron Carter, the new CEO, in person and also the rest of the Board.

There were a lot of items on the agenda – I was prepared for this as I had received relevant papers by email. The meeting was very fast moving. Denny had warned me about this.

Our RAG recommendations came up. Denny spoke about the first item, namely that sound proofing should be done by Hexagon to all new lets in older Victorian buildings.

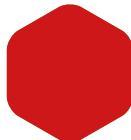
RAG felt that this should not be the responsibility of residents who may not have sufficient funds. There was a lot of discussion about this – the Board felt that the cost may be too high. It was decided that there should be more investigation to find out the extent of the problem, and then respond back to the Board and RAG at a later date.

The second RAG recommendation was noted but not discussed. RAG felt that Hexagon should not increase rents by the highest rate permitted by the Government.

Photos on this page supplied by Hexagon.



It was good to meet Rebecca Outram and Charles Mtakati in person as we had only previously met on Zoom.



Denny Senner has several years experience as a Resident Board Member.

This was in response to a presentation made at the RAG meeting by Nicky Hazelwood, Manager of the Community Investment Team. They do great work in helping people to find work, training to get better jobs and more recently helping people to cope with the high cost of living. (See the Community Investment pages 6–10). RAG felt that this great work is not helped by increasing rents too much. The Board felt that the issue should be discussed when the next Budget is being discussed.

In my view the meeting went well, and I was able to ask some questions. Everyone was friendly.

My only feedback – from attending just one meeting – is that the financial reports should be more user-friendly for everyone to understand, and residents should be able to ask relevant questions.

I can see that the Board are working hard to make things better.

Resident involvement is important at all levels.

# PHOTO COMPETITION



Congratulations to Gulnara Salimova (CRO) who entered our photo competition on the theme of Life Be In It, with these photos taken at Beddington Park duck pond and Orpington Hewits Farm. She wins a £20 shopping voucher.





# LAUNCH OF NEW REPAIRS CONTRACTOR



We saw the launch of our new Responsive Repairs Contract go live on the 1st July 2022, following an intensive procurement and mobilisation exercise involving residents, staff and consultants.

The launch was attended by resident representatives who had participated in the tendering and mobilisation of the contract, plus Terry Gilmartins who is founder and Director of Gilmartins; and Sheron Carter, Hexagon's new CEO. Other key members of Hexagon and Gilmartins staff also attended, as did representatives from our consultants Echelon. Terry Gilmartin and Sheron Carter mapped out their visions for the contract going forward – the key theme was ensuring that residents are at the heart of the service being delivered.

## STRONGER TEAM-WORKING

Hexagon will work with Gilmartins in a long-term partnership, which will be important to both parties. Most importantly, it will ultimately have an impact on the quality of repairs service to residents. The aim is for Hexagon and Gilmartins staff to work collaboratively as one team, with members of the Gilmartins team based at Hexagon's headquarters in Sydenham on certain days to foster greater teamworking and an overall improvement in service.

## POSITIVE CHANGES

There are positive changes in the way that Hexagon delivers the responsive repair service. Gilmartins will be taking the repairs calls direct, on freephone **0808-178-6785**. Gilmartins Contact Centre will be able to identify your repair and ensure that it is scheduled correctly, plus you will be given an appointment and receive a follow up reminder text before the repair is due to be completed – alternatively if your repair is not an emergency you can email Gilmartins on: [hexagonrepairs@gilmartins.co.uk](mailto:hexagonrepairs@gilmartins.co.uk)

From left: Ali Mohiyaldeem, Assistant Director of Gilmartins with Hexagon's Property Services Director Charles Mtakati and our new CEO Sheron Carter.



From right: Terry Gilmartin Founder and CEO of Gilmartins, cuts the celebration cake with Hexagon's new Chief Executive, Sheron Carter.

Photos on this page supplied by Hexagon.





**From left:** Customer Service Manager Neil Nasser, Home News Editor Adrian Beckingham and Chief Executive PA Val Sharpe were among other Hexagon staff who joined the launch.

## WHAT YOU SAY SO FAR

The response so far in relation to the new contractor has been positive customer satisfaction. Here are a handful of quotes extracted from the feedback we have been receiving from residents:

**“Contractor did a very good job and was very pleasant to speak with.”**

**“Very pleased – they also called to make sure I was happy with the job”**

**“He was very nice. Didn’t waste any time. Well behaved. Nice work and very quick. Thanks”**

Whilst Gilmartins will be carrying out day-to-day repairs, please note the following services which are not carried out by Gilmartins:

- Gas repairs or servicing is carried out by Smith and Byford’s – you can contact them on freephone 0800-088-443 24hrs a day 365 days a year
- For repairs regarding lifts, intercoms, door entry systems or pests please contact Hexagon on freephone number 0800-393-338 or if you have a general enquiry on 0208-778-6099
- Planned repairs, Kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes are dealt with by the Stock Improvement Team via our Customer Services on 020 8778 6699

**From left:** Sarah Baxter, Gilmartin’s Head of Delivery, with resident Sonji of the Repairs Group.



**From left:** Residents Christine, Sonji and Adrian who are members of the Repairs Group, with Gilmartins Supervisor Lauthman Paytel.



Hexagon residents from the Repairs Group, Hexagon staff and Gilmartins staff all converged for the launch of our new repairs contract.



**From left:** Hexagon’s Stock Improvement Manager, Rumana Khair talking with resident Adrian of the Repairs Group.



# FIRE SAFETY

## GAS SAFETY

You may only think about your gas appliances when something goes wrong or has broken down.

While nobody wants to be left without heating or hot water, unsafe gas appliances can have a more serious impact.

### Why is it important that gas appliances are checked?

Gas appliances such as boilers and cookers which aren't maintained or are faulty can put you and your family at risk of gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

To ensure that gas boilers and cookers are in good condition and don't pose a risk to residents it is vital that they are inspected and checked at least once a year.

**This check is a legal requirement and covers the main workings of the boiler and cooker to ensure faults or issues are highlighted so they can be rectified.**

### Advice for residents from Gas Safe

Gas Safe manage the registration system for all gas engineers. They give the following advice. Check for warning signs that your appliance might not be working correctly:

- dark, sooty staining on or around your gas appliance
- floppy yellow flames instead of crisp blue ones
- increased condensation inside windows
- the boiler pilot light keeps going out

### Don't be a Turn Off! When and why we take action...

Hexagon and our gas contractor do all we can to arrange for a suitable time for your annual gas safety check. We work around when suits residents best as much as we can.

**Due to the importance of these checks for resident safety we have a legal obligation that they be done.** If – despite repeated efforts – we do not get access before the previous certificate becomes overdue, we are obliged to 'make safe' by cutting the gas supply to the property. Where this cannot be done without accessing inside the property and the certificate has expired, we will apply for an injunction and, if all other efforts fail, force entry into the property. This is a costly and damaging process which we try to avoid but which we are legally required to do.

### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- Carbon Monoxide (CO) can be deadly. It is especially dangerous because you can't see, taste or smell it, and some symptoms mimic the effects of viruses – including headaches, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness, collapse, loss of consciousness.
- Carbon Monoxide is produced by faulty gas appliances or those with blocked or insufficient ventilation. It is vital that you have a specific CO alarm in every room where you have a gas appliance. This is separate from any smoke detectors which serve a different purpose.

#### If you:

- think your appliance is faulty
- are unsure whether you have a CO alarm or are concerned yours isn't working
- have any concerns or are unsure whether you will be able to make yourself available for the annual gas safety check

**Please get in touch!**

**(SEE CONTACT DETAILS ON BACK PAGE)**



Photos supplied by Hexagon.



## Candle Safety

### Shocking Statistics

The London Fire Brigade warn that an average of 21 candle fires start per month in London between February and October, rising to 29 fires a month in November through to January. Nearly 40 per cent of all housefires started by candles result in a death or injury.

### Candle Safety Top Tips

Always place your candles in a suitable fire-resistant candleholder, on a heat resistant surface. Keep candles away from ALL FLAMMABLES eg curtains, bedding, festive decorations.

#### Use battery powered LED candles

- Create a similar ambience
- Can be left unattended
- Remain safe if you doze off
- Remain safe if pets or children knock them over

## Fireworks Safety

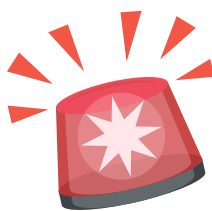
- Strictly no fireworks nor fires allowed on balconies
- Only buy brands which carry the CE mark
- Use one at a time, following instructions
- Light at arm's length with a taper, stand well back, directed away from spectators
- Never return after it has been lit
- Keep away from naked flames, including cigarettes
- Don't put in pockets nor throw them

## Bonfire Safety

- Never use paraffin or petrol
- Keep clear of buildings, sheds, fences and hedges
- Ensure all embers are out, dowsing with water, before leaving
- Keep a bucket of water nearby



The London Fire Brigade warn that an average of 21 candle fires start per month in London between February and October, rising to 29 fires a month in November through to January. Nearly 40 per cent of all housefires started by candles result in a death or injury.



# STAY FIRE-AWARE THIS FESTIVE SEASON

# YOUR NOMINATIONS: 2022 STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

It has again been a very challenging year for all of us and we still have some challenging times ahead. Nonetheless, we hope the staff at Hexagon have continued to provide you with the same high-quality service that you have come to expect – whether it was remote help, help over the telephone, or face-to-face help.

For the first time in three years we will be holding our Staff Conference face-to-face (we have had to do this over Zoom during the pandemic). At this conference held in November, we will present the annual Staff Excellence Awards and so we are asking **YOU** to show your appreciation to the staff of Hexagon, by nominating them for an award for “doing a great job”.

The Staff Excellence Awards take place to celebrate and congratulate the commitment and dedication of Hexagon’s staff who are prepared to “go that extra mile” whilst carrying out their duties. As well as Hexagon staff being able to nominate their colleagues, **YOU**, our residents, are invited to nominate staff who you feel deserve to receive an award.

You can nominate any member of Hexagon’s staff who you feel provides excellent customer service, or who has provided you with advice or extra support during the last 12 months.

If you would like to nominate a member of staff, please email us – with Staff Excellence in the subject heading – at:

**humanresources@hexagon.org.uk**

Please include the name of the member of staff you are nominating, your reason for nominating them and your name and address. When completing your reason for nominating, please try to be as concise as possible and provide specific example(s)

Alternatively you can complete the Nomination Form included in this edition of Home News.

**Nominations need to reach us by Sunday, 11th November 2022**



**2022 STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS - NOMINATION FORM** Hexagon

It has again been a very challenging year for all of us and we still have some challenging times ahead, but we hope the staff at Hexagon have continued to provide you with the same high quality service that you have come to expect. Whether it was remote help, help over the telephone, or face to face help, to do this over Zoom during the pandemic. At this conference we will present the annual Staff Excellence Awards and so we are asking YOU to show your appreciation to the staff of Hexagon, by nominating them for an award for “doing a great job”.

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You may want to nominate a member of staff who you feel provides you with excellent customer service, or a member of staff who has provided you with advice or extra support during the last 12 months. You can nominate any member of Hexagon’s staff.

If you would like to nominate a member of staff, please complete the slip below, giving the details of the member of staff you are nominating and your reason for nominating them. Once you have completed the form, please turn it over and fill in your name and address. Alternatively you can email your nomination to [humanresources@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:humanresources@hexagon.org.uk) or visit our website at [www.hexagon.org.uk/news](http://www.hexagon.org.uk/news) and complete on online form. Nominations need to be received by Sunday 11th November 2022.

I wish to nominate: (Please put name and job title of the staff member you are nominating) to receive a “Staff Excellence Award”

My reason for this nomination is:

YOUR NAME:

ADDRESS:

DATE:

Please ensure you return this form by Sunday 11th November 2022

FOLD AND WEED EDGES TO SEA

# KIDS' ZONE



Find the words in the puzzle grid below. Words may go forwards, backwards, across or down. If you think you have found all the correct words in the word search, send your entry to [homenews@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:homenews@hexagon.org.uk) by **26th November**. Three correct entries will be drawn at random. Each will receive a £10 shopping voucher.



AUTUMN Search

ALL ENTRIES TO KIDS' ZONE COMPETITIONS MUST INCLUDE CHILD'S FULL NAME, AGE AND ADDRESS. All winners receive a £10 shopping voucher.

Z C A G P I C A T B U  
O N I H U G U S T N L  
M O C O Y G C C B I Y  
B I B S K R W A Q N B  
I T C T O C T R N I I  
E A R R O N A Y A D K  
S V A M P I R E H I Y  
B A A H S T O H B B T  
O V M S A E L O T I O  
T O C T O B E R E A C

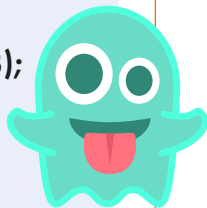
BAT CAT SPOOKY ZOMBIE  
BOO GHOST SCARY  
CANDY OCTOBER VAMPIRE

WINNERS

## Kids Page Winners

Congratulations to our Summer edition Wordsearch Winners

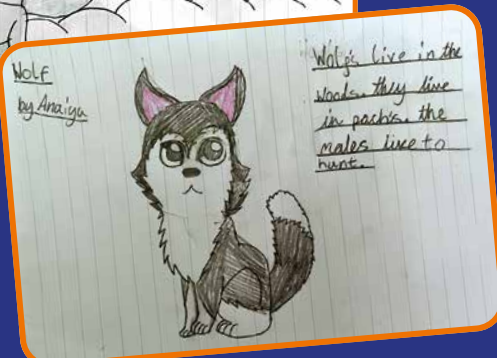
Congratulations to Bilal Darboe, age 9 (SE22); Alexis Jade Adaja, age 9 (SE13); and Ruth Abolarin, age 12 (DA8) who each win a £10 shopping voucher.



## Earth Friendly Kids competition winner

Congratulations to Anaiya Williams-Callam, aged 9 (SE19) who won our Earth Friendly Kids' Competition. Children were invited to draw a picture of a favourite animal which lives in the wild, including some details about where it lives. Anaiya sent in not one, but two, reproduced for our readers below.

Send in your entry by no later than Monday 28th November for your chance to win a £10 shopping voucher in the next round!



## SPOOKY JOKES

Q Who won the skeleton beauty contest?

A No body

Q Who did Frankenstein take to the party?

A His ghou friend

Q Why did the headless horseman apply for a new job?

A He was try to get a-head in life.





# HOME NEWS GOES DIGITAL

## They say the tides of change wait for no one.

The switch over of Home News from a printed paper magazine to a digital version – available via direct email and on our website – has been a topic for discussion over each of the previous four editions of Home News.

## SOME SUSTAINABILITY FACTS

Hexagon is unusual in that we still operate a system whereby residents automatically receive a paper copy unless they opt for a digital version. Of the dozens of publications designed by our designers Graphic Impressions – who serve housing associations, hospitals, and other community focused organisations – we now remain the only organisation to remain with the paper copy.

Whilst it is true that we ensure the paper magazine is printed on forest-friendly paper and delivered in a biodegradable plastic sleeve, there are financial and environmental costs directly linked with printing and distribution of the paper copies: to be precise, per edition printing costs circa £2000 and distribution circa £5000. This money can be used to help our other services by switching to digital – to say nothing of all those road miles and the global warming footprint saved by delivering the magazine at a click of a button, rather than in postal vans.

So, the issue you are reading now is the last one to be delivered with a paper copy as the automatic option. **Up until now every Hexagon household has received a paper copy of Home News, unless you directly contact us to request an emailed version.** From January 2023 onwards, every Hexagon resident for whom we hold a current email address will receive a digital copy of Home News in your email, unless you contact us to receive a paper copy in the post. It will also be available on our website: [www.hexagon.org.uk](http://www.hexagon.org.uk)

**Going digital also opens new opportunities for communications such as video content being included as part of the magazine.**

## STILL WANT A PAPER COPY?

Please email [homenews@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:homenews@hexagon.org.uk) to let us know you prefer to receive a paper copy of Home News, and we will be happy to send you one. Alternatively, call us on 020 8778 6699.

## WAYS YOU CAN CONTACT US

Freephone 0800 393 338

Landline 020 8778 6699

**Option 1** for all gas queries – your call will be automatically transferred to our Gas contractors

**Option 2** for all repairs related queries

**Option 3** for tenancy and rent queries

**Option 4** for general enquires

### Hexagon

[customer\\_desk@hexagon.org.uk](mailto:customer_desk@hexagon.org.uk)

for all general enquiries

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

Text 07537 400 527

130-136 Sydenham Road, London SE26 5JY

### Gilmartins

To report a repair call Gilmartins on 0808 178 6785 24 hours a day 365 days of the year, or email:

[hexagonrepairs@gilmartins.co.uk](mailto:hexagonrepairs@gilmartins.co.uk)

### Smith & Byford

Our new gas contractor Smith & Byford can be contacted on

Freephone: 0800 088 4433.

To report any new repairs email:

[hexagondomesticgas@smithandbyford.com](mailto:hexagondomesticgas@smithandbyford.com)

Follow us for regular updates, event invitations and news:

 [HexagonHousingAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/HexagonHousingAssociation)

 [@HexagonHousing](https://twitter.com/HexagonHousing)

## TRANSLATE!

Always happy to translate!

Chinese

永遠樂於翻譯！

Eritrean

"ንክብርታዊና ልዩነት ከሌሎች ሕገ-ሰነድ አይደለም"

French

Toujours heureux de traduire!

Portuguese

Sempre feliz a traduzir!

Vietnamese

Luôn luôn vui lòng phiên dịch!

Urdu

ترجمے کے لیے ہر دم تیار

## LARGE PRINT

If you would like this edition of Home News in large print or braille, please contact Hexagon.