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THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE TENANTS
OF WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING

FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The appalling loss of life in a Camberwell tower block in July was a sober reminder to all of us of how easily a fire can take hold, how rapidly it can spread, and the heartbreak it can cause, writes head of property services **Sue Hockett**

We regularly carry out stringent fire checks in all our properties, and take expert advice from the Fire Brigade. We are now taking extra measures to make sure your homes are as safe as they can be.

Sensible guidelines

All of you are considered capable of living independently so our fire safety guidelines work on the principle that if a fire breaks out the most sensible precaution is to offer you a safe route out of the building. For most of you that will

mean using the main staircase.

Our fire safety measures are designed to tick all these boxes:

- If a fire breaks out it will be quickly detected and will trigger an alarm, quickly warning everyone there is a fire risk.
- You have a fast, unobstructed route out of the building.
- The ability of fire and smoke to spread is limited by special doors and other barriers.
- We have given you the best possible advice on what to do if there is a fire in the building.

Fire alerts

If we have carried out planned repairs to your building in recent years it is likely we installed a smoke alarm in your flat, powered from the main electricity supply. We check and test these regularly. If you do not have one of the new alarms we will install one next time we do planned repairs to your building. We have also put smoke detectors and alarms in some shared areas and plan to install them in all properties over time.

Fire prevention

We have been upgrading means of escape and are confident most properties are as safe as they can be, with doors used for the main escape route meeting the legal standard for controlling the spread of smoke and flames. We're also making sure fire cannot easily spread from one flat to another. We may need to make a few more minor building alterations next time we do your planned repairs.

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FIRE SAFETY AT HOME

Anyone can ask the Fire Brigade to visit **your flat** to check it for fire safety. The visit takes no more than a few minutes and is free. You can ask for a visit online at **www.london-fire.gov.uk**, call ☎ **08000 28 44 28** or ☎ **020 8555 1200** then the extension for your borough:

- Camden **34326**
- Ealing **38615**
- Hammersmith & Fulham **54800**
- Harrow **38228**
- Hillingdon **38228**
- Kensington & Chelsea **54811**
- Wandsworth **37601**
- Westminster **34300**

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FIRE PRECAUTIONS

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Safety advice

On your house noticeboard you can find information on what to do if a fire breaks out and the fastest route out of the house. Signs are also being put up so your escape route is clearly marked.

Escape routes

We have been fitting emergency lights in shared parts of the building that will switch on automatically in an emergency so you can see your way out along the escape route. These lights are being fitted when we carry out planned repairs.

We are also checking properties weekly to make sure all doors to and along escape routes close properly and none are wedged open. And we are making sure nothing is left or stored in parts you share with neighbours that

might catch fire or block someone's way out of the building in an emergency. This is such a serious matter we have adopted a policy of zero tolerance. If we find anything blocking the fire escape route, we will remove it.

Bikes and buggies

There is no way to sugar this pill. The Fire Brigade has told us that by law nothing can be left or stored in cupboards, on landings, in stairwells or hallways in parts of the building



you share. This includes prams and bicycles. In the past your housing officer may have said you can store one or two items in cupboard or maybe another communal area.

Given how very important it is that no one's life is put at risk, we are sorry but we now have to ask you to move them. We are trying to think of alternative ways for you to store bulky items so please let us know if you come up with a good idea!

Why don't we have fire extinguishers in shared parts?

We do not store fire fighting equipment in most properties because we cannot offer training in their safe use or how to judge whether a fire can be safely tackled. They might also block your safe exit from the building. And there is a small risk they might be used by people out to cause trouble.

FREQUENTLY ASKED: YOUR QUESTIONS TO ...

THE PROPERTY SERVICES TEAM

Q: When can I get a new kitchen?

A: A few years ago we started replacing the oldest kitchens in our properties. Replacing kitchens is a new service so we have had to find a way to pay for it and we need to be careful how we use the money.

We run a very tight operation financially. We have always charged much less rent than private landlords so every penny of rental income is carefully accounted for. It also means we hold very little money in reserve.



To pay for the new kitchens we are having to borrow from our bank. And we have to be sure we can repay these loans.

One way to do this would be to charge more rent for flats with a new kitchen. Your rent increases are controlled by law so we cannot

simply raise the money to pay back a loan by pushing your rent up.

We can however charge a relatively higher rent to new tenants so it makes sense to put a new kitchen into any flats that fall empty. It is easier to get the work done in an empty home and we know the appeal of a new kitchen means the flat will be let faster, so the rest of you are not left footing the bill for rent lost on an empty flat.

This does not mean the rest of you are being left out. It does mean we cannot give you all a new kitchen as quickly as we'd like. As a priority we are replacing those in a poor state of repair in buildings where we are doing planned repairs.

Doing the work in job lots helps keep a cap on costs but there are still limits on our budget so we ask our surveyors to check all the kitchens then decide which most

need replacing. Empty studio flats are another priority and all studio flats should eventually benefit from our *More than Decent* makeover.

Special case

Last year we stretched ourselves to the limit, installing 61 kitchens instead of 40, as planned. As explained in our summer rent supplement, our finances will be especially tight for the next few years so we cannot afford to repeat that.

Of course there is nothing to stop you improving your kitchen yourself. *Please ask us before you do anything as you will need our permission in writing.* If the basic structure of your cupboards and drawers is sound, you might find just replacing the cupboard doors and drawer fronts and putting in a new worktop makes a big difference.

We cannot pay for the work but if and *when you move on* from your flat, and if your kitchen is still in good repair, we may be prepared to then make you a one-off compensation payment.

SERVICE CHECK: SHIP SHAPE HOMES

Our **property services team** has the job of keeping your homes safe, comfortable and efficient. It arranges the repairs you report to us. It makes sure the building is regularly decorated and in a good condition. The team is working hard to get your kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems upgraded and to make your homes more energy efficient. When a flat falls empty, property services gets it ready for the new tenant. The team is also responsible for health and safety in your building and for the cleaning, caretaking and other estate services.

Speed of repairs you reported

In 2008/09 we did 4,121 repairs to your homes. When you report a problem we tell you how quickly that repair needs to be dealt with. This reflects the nature of the problem and the likely risk to you or other residents and our property. The figures below show how many repairs were completed within our target times in 2008/09.

Repairs done within target time	We aimed for	We achieved
emergency - make safe within 24 hours	99%	99%
urgent - complete within 3 days	97%	99%
prompt - complete within 7 days	97%	97%
routine complete within 28 days	97%	100%
percentage completed on the first visit	90%	99%

Your feedback matters

We send you a survey form if we have arranged any work to your flat or we've been doing repairs or decorations to your building. We use your responses to check you were happy with the service. We also look for any signs that disabled or minority tenants were treated differently. Your replies influence how we plan our work and decide which contractors we will use in future.

Repairs you reported

We got back 578 survey forms from those of you whose homes underwent a repair last year. This feedback told us that **97%** of you were satisfied with the service. That is higher than the year before's figure of **95%**, which was also our target for 2008/09.

Most of you were satisfied with the way our contractors handled work, with rates from **95-98%**. But ratings for S Robbins and MNM came in at around **88%**.

We have stopped using MNM. We have raised with S Robbins the drop in satisfaction because we have worked with them for a long time and they scored highly in earlier years. We are hopeful satisfaction levels will be restored to reflect their usual standards this year.

Repairs we planned ahead

One in three of residents of houses that underwent planned repairs and decoration sent back survey forms. Based on those results, your satisfaction with the way this work

was done has risen from **77%** last year to **91%**. Our target was 90%.

Three contractors worked on these contracts for us in 2008/09. Satisfaction with Arlington was good, and in line with earlier years. NAL got an improved result, but has gone out of business

We used E and M for the first time this year and given your glowing response will ask them to tender for more work. We do need to bear in mind that the work they did was unlikely to have caused any of you much disruption as they did no work inside your homes.

Satisfaction rates:

Arlington Builders	91%
NAL	81%
E and M	100%

Gas safety

We're delighted to say we were able to get access to every single flat again this year so our contractors have were able to check all gas-fired appliances we've installed in your homes for safety and efficiency.

Cleaning and caretaking

Next year we hope to include figures for caretaking and cleaning in our report. We have been working hard to improve the services, hampered slightly by staffing changes and absences. Our focus for now is on keeping you better informed and giving clear, consistent replies to your queries.

Energy efficiency

All of your homes are given a **SAP rating**, indicating its energy efficiency. Most are rated C, on a scale from A (very energy efficient) to G.

The overall average rating for our homes rose from **73** in 2007 to **73.3** in 2008. Back in 2001 when we started this work, our average rating was **54**.

We are hoping to raise our rating to **74** this year through more draught-proofing and insulation. It's a modest target but reasonable given a tight budget and the fact that most of our properties are Victorian houses in Conservation areas.

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SERVICE CHECK

Kitchen upgrades

We have been upgrading kitchens when we do planned repairs to our properties and to any flats that fall empty during the year.

We usually aim to upgrade 40 kitchens in any one year. In 2008/09 we fitted 61 new kitchens, 25 done alongside planned repairs and 36 installed in empty flats including 23 studio flats. It was rather more than we had planned but the works were needed and last year we were able to absorb the extra cost.

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Heating upgrades

At the beginning of 2008 only 52 of you did not have central heating. Of these a small number of flats are unsuitable but we wrote to the others tenants asking if they would like central heating installed. Twelve who said yes then failed to let our surveyor in to draw up plans. As a result we were only able to install **five** new systems. We replaced old boilers in another **eight** flats.

In properties that have communal heating and hot water

plants, we have also been upgrading systems so they use much less fuel. We hope over time that this will lead to lower fuel bills.

Security grants

If you are worried about security we can offer a grant to help pay for works to make your flat feel safer. None of you applied for a security grant last year. We can offer a grant worth up to **£100** to help with the cost of improving security but you must agree the work with us in advance. For details call Peter Sheehan on ☎ 020 8749 7112.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS OUT OF OFFICE HOURS

If you need an emergency repair when our office is closed please call the contractor below for the repair you need. An emergency is a problem that poses a risk of **personal injury, a health hazard or serious danger** to your belongings or our property.

General plumbing

EPM ☎ 020 8670 9232

Gas fire or boiler in your flat

Daynight ☎ 01425 623 954/

☎ 07860 234 899

Communal boiler for heating or hot water to the whole house

S and S Burners ☎ 020 8330 7992

Lifts Bardeck ☎ 020 8453 0200

Electricals MAC ☎ 020 7486 9075

If all the electricity in the house fails ring EDF on ☎ 0800 028 0247 or ☎ 0845 7444 555 if you live in

West Drayton

Locks Barrs ☎ 07790 609 545

If you call Barrs because you have locked yourself out or lost your keys you will be charged.

General building problems

S Robbins ☎ 07739 469 400

If you suspect a gas leak please ring Transco on ☎ 0200 111 999

DURING OFFICE HOURS
**CALL OUR REPAIRS
TEAM** ☎ 020 8743 4422

AUTUMN CALENDAR – FREE BROWSING

The goods aren't free but the atmosphere is. Here's what you can find at some of London's longstanding street markets

Berwick Street Market

Berwick Street, Soho W1F 0PH.

Fruit, vegetables, cheeses, fabrics and more. Open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 5.30pm with the best time to visit being lunchtime.

Shepherds Bush Market

Uxbridge Road and Goldhawk

Road, W12. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 8.30am to 6pm (Thursdays at 1pm).

Covent Garden Market,

Covent Garden, Westminster WC2.

Antique stalls included on Mondays.

Leather Lane Market

Leather Lane, EC1N. Open from 10.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Friday. Ideal for cut-price women's wear.

Hammersmith farmer's market

Lyric Square, King Street, W6.

Organic food, from 11am to 3pm.

Portobello Road Market

Portobello Road, Kensington W11.

The largest antiques market in the world on Fridays and Sundays but Portobello Market sells fruit and vegetables, flowers, cheese, bread and more daily at 177 Portobello Road.

Spitalfields Market

Brushfield Street, Spitalfields, E1.

Open all week, but most popular on Sundays. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays shops only are open to the public. First and third Wednesdays of the month are for deli stalls, records and books. Thursday is for antiques. Friday is fashion and arts.

Brixton Market, **Brixton Road,**

SW9. 300 stalls selling Europe's best Caribbean food. Open from Monday to Saturday 10am till sunset. Opposite Brixton tube you'll find a new art market on Sundays from 11am to 5.30pm.

BREAKING NEWS

New **National Tenant Voice** now recruiting

News has just come in that 50 tenants are being sought by the government for a new standalone council. The **National Tenant Voice** will represent the views of social housing tenants across England and be a sounding board on housing policy matters. **Applications close on 16 October.** Find out more on ☎ 0800 917 7396 or www.hays.com/jobs/ntv