

# PIONEER PRESS

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ISSUE 1

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE TENANTS  
OF WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING

## THE HOUSE WORKS

Keeping the buildings you live in safe, weatherproof, warm and nice to look at is an ongoing and complex task. Head of property services **Sue Hockett** gives us an insight – pages 1, 2 and 3

### WHAT IS CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE?

This is our name for work like *redecorating* the shared inside areas and outsides of our properties and carrying out any *repairs* needed to keep the structure sound and weatherproof. The work will usually involve:

- redecorating shared halls, landings and foyers
- repairing the roof, parapets and chimney stacks
- overhauling drains and gutters
- mending any outer wall problems, like crumbling brickwork or render
- repairing any balconies and porticos over front doors
- making good any damaged windows and outside doors
- painting window sills, doors and so on.

Negotiated contracts make for a happier customer

**F**eedback from those of you in properties that underwent cyclical maintenance last year showed most of you by a long shot were happier with work done under contracts we negotiated with a builder than with the two we put out to competitive tender.

#### Stark difference

Satisfaction with contracts we negotiated came in at an impressive 98% and 95%. But contracts given to firms that won through competing bids were not handled as well, according to your feedback. Just 59% of tenants at one property told us they were happy with the

contractor's performance and 74% of tenants at the other.

By law we have to put contracts out to tender if some flats have been bought under right to buy. Residents of these flats have to foot part of the bill so this is intended to make sure they get the work done for the best price.

Where all flats are occupied by our tenants only, we can negotiate the terms to get what we think is the best deal for factors like price, quality and customer satisfaction.

● About 40p in every £1 of your rent goes on cyclical maintenance. This year we expect to spend £649,470 on cyclical works. Another £295,000 will go on other building works we can do more cost effectively at the same time.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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### Practical schedule

Judging what work is needed to a property to keep it sturdy for the next 15 years, and how much it might cost, is done for us by surveyors Walker Management. Each property is surveyed every eight years.

Much of the work can only be done safely with scaffolding. Inevitably, it will also cause some inconvenience and generates noise and dust. We therefore try to do at the same time any other jobs that need a scaffold or that may be noisy or dirty to help keep disruption to a minimum.

☞ for more, see page two...

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## GETTING RESULTS

Hard facts and **your feedback** help us plan our cyclical maintenance work each year

### Your feedback

We use the comments you make in the cyclical maintenance survey to carry out a thorough review of how each of the four contracts was handled. We also report the results to our board.

**Overall, 77% of you were satisfied with the works last year, down from 91% the year before.**

Some of you reported that you were unhappy with the way the works were organised at your property. We have taken this up with our builders and technical consultants and hope this year will see overall satisfaction rise to at least 90%.

**Arlington Builders** proved most popular, with all of those commenting on the quality of their work saying we should carry on using their service.

### Improvement works

We fell a little short of our aim of giving 40 of you a new kitchen because three tenants failed to let our workers in to either measure up or do the work. But 37 of you got a **better kitchen** in 2007/08. Our target for the year now in hand is to upgrade kitchens for another 40 of you.

A very small number of you still lack a modern **central heating** system. Putting this right is still proving difficult. In early 2008 we wrote to all tenants without central heating and 15 replied. But of these just **nine** agreed to let us install a new heating system. We also took advantage of four flats falling empty to install central heating. We now have very few flats needing a new system but hope to have installed another 15 by 31 March this year.

## WHILE WE'RE ON THE JOB

We've already got the builders out to do the **cyclical maintenance** so it makes sense to get them do a few other jobs we know need doing while they're there

Some of the tasks we hope to do alongside cyclical maintenance are legal duties, mainly those concerned with your health and safety. Others might be jobs you and your neighbours have specifically asked us to do or works we have lined up under our 'Decent Homes' improvement programme. So you might find us doing tasks for:

### Health and safety

- \* putting special seals on the front doors of flats so if a fire does break out smoke will not leak through and the fire is less likely to spread
- \* installing emergency lighting for shared halls and stairs so you can

### Smart: making the most of scaffolding



see your way out, backed up by smoke alarms and fire detectors

- \* installing smoke alarms that don't need a battery to run in flats that do not already have them
- \* testing any systems in your flats or shared areas that run on electricity and upgrading those that do not meet current standards
- \* checking for asbestos, and where necessary, carefully removing it.

### Structural repairs

- \* such as stripping off then recovering the roof and any dormer windows, putting right structural defects and remedying any damp

### Television connections

- \* installing a new system to pick up digital TV channels, but only after first consulting all residents in the house and getting a vote in favour by the majority

### Pest control

- \* fitting anti-pigeon devices to the outside walls

### Home improvements

- \* fitting new kitchens/bathrooms
- \* making your flat more energy efficient, usually by installing secondary glazing

## WHO DOES WHAT

The technical experts employed for each contract include:

- **contract administrator** Keeps a check on how well the work is going, instructs the contractor and keeps a professional check on costs
- **CDM (construction design and management) co-ordinator** Makes sure Women's Pioneer and the building contractor keep to all the legal regulations for health and safety
- **clerk of works** Our eyes and ears on site, making sure the contractor is doing all the works set out in the contract and checking the work standards
- **design consultant** A relatively new role, coming up with alternative ideas for the design and decoration of the areas you share with the other residents and finding out your views on those proposals
- **resident liaison officer** Appointed by our contractor to handle all your queries and liaise with you and your neighbours over times when the builders will need to be working inside the building.

**CONSULTING FIRST**

Before we carry out any work we first need to consult all of you – tenants and leaseholders – over any parts of the work you will have to pay for. Not surprisingly, not all of you will agree what needs to be done – nor how.

**Leaseholder charge**

Anyone who has bought their flat, or bought a flat sold under the right to buy, has to pay in full their share of any works to the building's structure and to shared areas as well as for services like fire alarms, smoke detectors, emergency lights, and for any new carpets.

A leaseholder can therefore face a bill of £3-11,000. Payments are spread over 12 months but quite reasonably they will want to be sure they get value for money. So our asset manager spends a long time preparing information on costs and timings for each aspect of the work. He then has to consult each resident, helped by our estate services manager on matters like, for example, major works to tackle pests or communal TV aerial systems, which are paid for through your service charge.

**ADVANCE WARNING**

Most cyclical maintenance works start in July with the aim of completing them all by December. Once we know enough details of a contract for your property, our staff will let you know what we expect to happen and when.

We will also meet the builders on site once a month so can check that any issues you have raised with them are being dealt with.

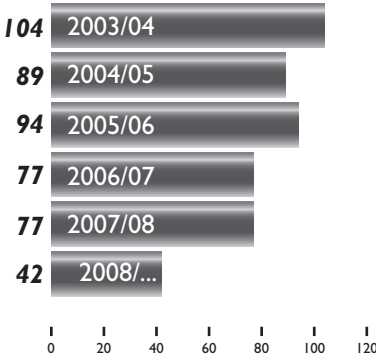
After the works are completed, there is for six months what we call a defects period. At the end of the period we expect the builder to return to mend any problems. Any urgent problems, of course, should be dealt with at once.

**VACANCIES SLOWING DOWN**

We are seeing a steady drop in the number of flats coming up for letting and one local council wants a few more of those that do. Head of housing **Christine Desborough** reports

Low tenant turnover in the past few years has led to a large drop in the number of flats we have been able to offer to other women in housing need, down from **104** to **77** since 2004. In the nine months to the end of December last year, we let just **42** flats to new tenants.

**New lettings each year**



These figures were given in a paper presented to our board in January. Other news we reported included:

- an increase in the percentage of vacant flats RB **Kensington & Chelsea** wants us to make available for people from its waiting list
- a rise in the top level of **savings** and **income** we think reasonable for potential new tenants
- a new incentive for women living on their own in a two- or three-bedroom flat to **downsize**.

We have also updated our lettings policy to make special mention of two **waiting lists** we hold for older women who ask us direct if we can house them (see page 4).

**Stock take**

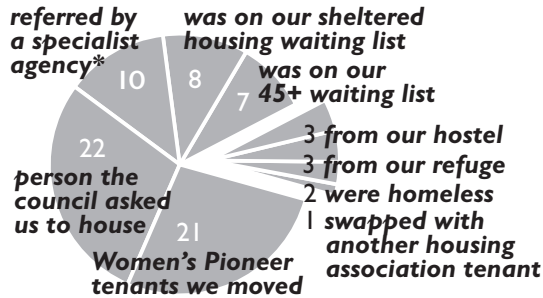
The number of homes we own has stayed very much the same over the past 10 years at 1,000 spread over eight west London boroughs. Just 20 of these are houses. Most by

far are studio or one bedroom flats – over eight in 10.

We have a legal duty to help the local council in most boroughs where we work to meet local housing need. That means **50%** of all smaller flats that fall empty, when a tenant moves on or dies, must be offered to a woman the council wants us to house. That has now changed in Kensington & Chelsea, which has asked for **75%** of empty homes to be made available under its choice-based lettings scheme.

We also offer a small number of studio flats to women referred by specialist agencies, like the Latin American Women's Project. But tenants needing a transfer get priority if a suitable home comes up and we try to balance the ages of residents in each property.

**Who we housed in 2007/08**



We do have a marked shortage of homes suitable for larger households, a problem that makes it particularly hard for us to help those of you with growing families. But a very small number of tenants now living on their own have a flat designed for a larger household.

To encourage these tenants to consider moving to a smaller home we have agreed we will make a one-off payment of **£4,000**, plus £1,000 for removal costs, to any tenant giving up a two or three bedroom flat for a smaller home.

**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

**SPANISH TRANSLATION**

**Estimados inquilinos de habla hispana.** Mi nombre es Maria y esta nota es para comunicar a todo el inquilino hispanohablante y que tenga dificultad en comunicarse con nosotros en ingles, que se puede poner en contacto con nuestra oficina (☎ 020 8749 7112) y concertar una cita si necesitan mi ayuda como interprete en todo lo que se relacione con su vivienda en Women's Pioneer Housing.  
*atentamente, Maria Velázquez*

## QUEUEING UP FOR A HOME

We hold two **waiting lists** for women who apply to us direct for a home. The lists are only for homes in relatively low demand – our six sheltered schemes in Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham, and some of our studio flats

**Sheltered housing waiting list:** joined the list first, but we will only open to older women wanting a studio flat in one of our six sheltered schemes. They must genuinely need the service, which includes support from a scheme manager, and have no other suitable place to live. There is an upper cap on incomes and savings. Priority goes to whoever make two offers.

**45 plus waiting list:** women aged 45 or over can join this small list of 12 if they are willing to consider a studio flat. As with sheltered, there is an incomes cap but we make just one offer: The first offer goes to whoever has been on the list longest.

## SPRING CALENDAR

\* ALL FREE UNLESS PRICE GIVEN

Sunday 1 March

**Maslenitsa** traditional Russian pre-Lent festival, with blini or pancakes. Russian food, music, dance and theatre. From 1-6pm. Potters Field, SE1 (between Tower Bridge and City Hall) [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

Saturday 28 March

**Get cracking!!** Design your own eggcup, and make Easter decorations. Materials provided. All ages welcome. From 11am to noon, Barbican children's library in EC2Y.

Thursday 5 March

**Chamber music for violin and viola** Lunchtime concert at St Paul's Church, Bedford St, Covent Garden. Starts 1pm

Sunday 29 March

**Oxford v. Cambridge boat race.** World famous event, first held in 1829. Starts 3.40pm at Thames river bank between Mortlake and Putney

Saturday 14 March

**Fun guided walk:** Gather at Hyde Park Corner tube station then walk, run, cycle or rollerblade along a historic route to the Embankment. Free drinks, packs, guides, first aid points en route. From 10am-4pm

Saturday/Sunday 9-10 May

**Beat the crunch expo** Advice on managing finances, cutting fuel bills, eating well on a budget and more. Seminars on Saturday from 10am-6pm, Sunday from 10am-5pm. At Earls Court 2, Warwick Road, SW5. [www.beatthecrunchexpo.com](http://www.beatthecrunchexpo.com)

21-27 March

**Make time for cake time** Tuck in while raising money for homelessness charity Shelter. To register for your free pack call ☎ 0844 515 1190 or see [www.shelter.org.uk/caketime](http://www.shelter.org.uk/caketime)

Saturday 16 May

**London Sangerstevne** International festival with choirs from France, Italy, Portugal, Lithuania, Indonesia and UK. Concerts at 2pm, 4.30pm and 7pm. At St Matthew's Church, North Common Road, Ealing W5 [www.sangerstevne.org.uk](http://www.sangerstevne.org.uk)

Sunday 22 March

**Frock me!** Clothes from every era for sale from £1 to £100s. Opens 11am, Chelsea Old Town Hall, King's Road. Entry £4. ☎ 020 7361 2220. [www.frockmevintagefashion.com](http://www.frockmevintagefashion.com)

Every Thursday

**Hammersmith farmers market** in Lyric Square, King Street, W6. Organic delights from 11am-3pm