

# PIONEER PRESS

WINTER 2009

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE TENANTS  
OF WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING

ISSUE 4



**Twinkletoes:** Mary Smith Court was treated to a performance by the London Children's Ballet in September. For more on Mary Smith Court, and an invitation to join our events, see page 3

## MIXED BAG ON RENTS

We put your rent and service charge up once a year. For some of you the rise happens in January, others get it in July, writes head of housing **Christine Desborough**. The bad news is some of you will get a big increase in 2010. We know this will cause difficulties for many of you. We hope this helps explain why it is happening

### January rent increases

If your rent and service charge go up in **January** your rent could go up next year by, at most, 5.5% plus £2 per week. This is because the government tells us we must put up rents according to its formula.

Most of you will see your **service charge** go up. A small

number of you may see a cut or the charge may stay level (see page two for more on service charges).

**The result:** unfortunately you could be worse off next year because your rent will go up and most of you will also have to pay a higher service charge.

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Wishing you all a *very happy* Christmas and a  prosperous new year

### SPRING COMPETITION

Does your flat look great? Have you done a fantastic job of **decorating your flat** (and even your most honest friends agree) or have you come up with **an ingenious way to save space**? Tell us about it and we'll come round for a look for our spring competition. Entries will be judged by a team including Stanbridge Designs, which does our communal decorations. Call us on ☎ 020 8749 7112 by 4.30pm on **Monday 11 January** and you could win **£30 cash**.



WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING LIMITED

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## MIXED BAG FOR RENTS

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### July rent increase

If your rent and service charge go up in **July** your rent will have risen in July this year by up to 5.5% plus £2 per week because of the government formula. The same formula will mean that in July 2010 the increase will be much smaller because prices have dropped. This affects the formula.

The **service charge** in most of our properties will be going up. But in some it will go down or stay more or less the same.

**The result:** your rent will stay much the same in July 2010 but most of you will see your service charge go up.

### Service charges

Your service charge is the amount we estimate we'll spend on services to your building in the current year, January to December, spread over 12 months. We add or cut any costs we under- or over-estimated in earlier years.

So if we charged you too much in one year, we reduce your charge by the amount you overpaid once we know the actual costs. In January 2010 your service charge will pay for our estimate of the 2010 costs plus any undercharge or overcharge for 2008. Why so far back? Because we work out the costs in 2009 and we'll still be getting bills early in 2010 for things we bought or used in 2009.

In 2010, service charges will stay about the same or go down in one in four properties. The rest of you will pay a lot more because:

- power bills will cost more
- we're spending more on pest control in some properties
- of 2008 undercharges, caused mainly by very late bills from gas and electricity firms that meant earlier estimates were based on poor information.

## FINDING HELP TO PAY THE EXTRA

We appreciate how hard many of you will find the higher rent and service charges, especially so if you are on a low income or a small pension. It may be worth checking to see that you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to. Your local council or citizens advice bureau (CAB) may be able to help.

### Kensington and Chelsea

#### **Kensington & Chelsea council**

☎ 020 7937 5464 or [www.rbkc.gov.uk/advice](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/advice) and benefits

**CAB** 140 Ladbroke Grove,

W10 ☎ 0844 826 9708

**CAB** Old Town Hall, Kings Rd,

SW3 ☎ 0844 826 9708

### Hammersmith & Fulham

#### **Hammersmith & Fulham council**

Monday-Friday, 8am-

6.30pm ☎ 0845 803 1020

**CAB** The Pavilion, 1 Mund St,

W14 ☎ 0845 458 2515

### Harrow

**CAB** ☎ 0844 826 9711

### Camden

**CAB** ☎ 08451 202 965

Monday-Friday 1-4 pm

### Ealing

**Ealing council** benefits advice

line ☎ 020 8825 8555, open

Monday to Friday 10am-4pm

email [CBT@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:CBT@ealing.gov.uk)

### Wandsworth

**CAB** ☎ 020 8333 6960

Tues 2-3 pm, Thurs 10-11am

### Westminster

**Westminster council** benefits

advice team ☎ 020 7941 6906

**CAB** ☎ 0844 477 1611

### Hillingdon

**CAB** Tues-Thurs 9.30am-12.30pm

and 1-3pm ☎ 0844 848 7903

### The government

**Advice on money, tax and benefits** [www.direct.gov.co.uk](http://www.direct.gov.co.uk)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED: YOUR RENT QUESTIONS

### **Why do some rents change in January and others in July?**

We do this to smooth out the workload over the year.

### **Is it unfair to some tenants?**

No. Everyone pays the same increase. It's just that some of you get it in January and some in July, but everyone pays it for 12 months.

### **Why do you put rents up so much?**

Housing associations have to put up rents using the government formula: retail price index (RPI) inflation + 0.5% + £2 per week.

### **What is RPI inflation and how does it affect my rent?**

Inflation is worked out by comparing the 'average cost of goods' in September with their cost 12 months before. We apply it to your rents from the following April. So, we work out rents that go up in January 2010 using inflation from September 2008. July 2010 rents are worked out using the inflation figure for September 2009.

Inflation was high in 2008 (5%) but it turned into deflation in 2009, dropping to -1.4%. So if your rent goes up in January, you'll be hit with the 5% figure but after January 2011 your rent will only be slightly higher.

### **Do we have any choice over the rent increases?**

No. All housing associations have to do it.

Festive season starts at Mary Smith Court 🎁

Mary Smith Court always welcomes visits from other Women's Pioneer tenants, friends and family. Why not join us in the community lounge over December?

🍷 **Friday 11 December**

**Art class: make your own Xmas cards and decorations.**

🍷 Starts 11.30am. All welcome.

🍷 **Saturday 12 December**

**Jumble sale:** From 11am-2pm. Donations of unwanted clothing or bric a brac welcome but we'll need it a few days earlier: **Mince pies and wine tasting** for anyone who cares

🍷 to stay on after the sale!

🍷 **Friday 18 December**

**Cinderella** performed by Carousel Theatre Company. Starts 11.15am. Back by popular demand after their summer performance of *Summer Holiday: Abroad*. After the show there'll be a **Christmas buffet and drinks** for all who join us.

And year round...

**Learning basic English:** basic English classes every Wednesday from 2pm-3pm. **Free**

**Foreign language project:** one-to-one help from SixtyPlus volunteers communicating in English. **Free**

**Computer classes:** one to one help for all skill levels given by Age Concern volunteers. **Free**

**Arthritis exercise:** with an NHS tutor; every Thursday from 2.15pm-3.15pm. **£1.25 per session**

**Advanced tai chi:** every Wednesday from 7pm-8.30pm

**Spanish welfare advice:** every Tuesday 2pm-5pm. Contact the Spanish welfare secretary via the office at Mary Smith Court.

**For more on our events and activities call Gabriella Baranek on ☎ 020 7370 5878. Mary Smith Court is at 17-21 Trebovir Road in Earls Court, at the corner of Templeton Place. ♿**

## CELEBRATING: OLDER PEOPLE'S DAY



*We celebrated Older People's Day at Mary Smith Court on 1 October, with art classes in the morning, followed by a Give and Take, swapping unwanted clothing and accessories. Both were a great success with tenants and guests.*



## FINDING OUT THE FRAUDS

Subletting is a hot issue right now and we are working hard to help stamp it out. Let there be no mistake: subletting is fraud, stealing homes from those who need them to line the pockets of those who don't.

### Combined effort

We are working closely with your local councils' corporate fraud sections to track down tenants who are letting their flat, and frequently pocketing large profits

at the expense of the rest of you and council tax payers.

After an investigation earlier this year, notice has been served on two tenants where we have gathered extensive evidence of subletting. Several more cases are with our solicitors.

If we get any proof a tenant is subletting, we will pursue it vigorously. If you have any reason to believe your neighbour is involved, please tell us. We will treat all information in confidence.

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT OUR SERVICE 🏠

**We have a four-stage process to resolve any complaints about our service. If after going through all four-stages you feel your problem is not resolved, you may go to the independent housing ombudsman. Independent Housing Ombudsman, 105-109 The Strand, London WC2R 0AA ☎ 0845 712 5973 (lo-call rate)**

## FEEDBACK: ROOM TO IMPROVE

Earlier this year The Leadership Factor surveyed your views on our services on our behalf. They found that 85% of our sheltered tenants were satisfied with us overall. This is the highest score for sheltered housing they have encountered.

### Different perspective

It's a different picture in our other properties, though those of you who have a caretaker are generally happier. Overall, we're about mid-way compared to other landlords The Leadership Factor surveys.

Since the last survey in 2007 we have improved, but we still have

some way to go. Our top priority is improving information and how we communicate with you.

If you use the internet you might like to look at our website where we are adding a lot more information, including an up to date list of people who want to swap flats. When you ask for a repair we now make sure we tell you how quickly it should be completed.

If you phone us we now run checks to make sure your call was returned. And we are following up complaints to make sure you get a prompt reply from us and to give you a chance to tell us how we could improve.

## SPICE UP PIONEER PRESS

Help us make *Pioneer Press* a better read and better looking. **Tastier:** why not send in a favourite recipe from your homeland or a place you went to on holiday?

**Celebratory:** have you done something you're particularly proud of? If so we'd love to interview you for *Pioneer Press*.

**Stylish:** see our competition on page one. Plus, we're looking to give *Pioneer Press* a makeover. If you'd like to join a group of tenants and staff deciding how *Pioneer Press* should look and read, call Christine Desborough on ☎ 020 7849 7112.

## EMERGENCY REPAIRS AT CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR

Our offices close from 1pm on 24 December and open again at 9:30am on 4 January. If you need an emergency repair during this time the contractors below have agreed to cover genuine emergencies. An **emergency** is a situation posing a **health hazard**, a risk of **personal injury**, or where **serious damage** might be done to your **property** or ours. Contractors charge much more than their usual rate over Christmas so please do not call them out for repairs that could reasonably wait until our office reopens.

**Electrical repairs:** **MAC Electric Services** ☎ 020 7486 9075. If the supply to all parts of the house is affected call **EDF** ☎ 0800 028 0247

**Locksmiths:** **Barrs Security** ☎ 07790 609 545. If you lock yourself out or lose your keys you will have to pay for the call-out.

**Individual gas boilers and appliances:** (that were installed by us) **Daynight** ☎ 01425 623 954. Listen to the answerphone message for the duty engineer's phone number.

**Plumbing repairs:** **EPM** ☎ 020 8670 9232

**Communal heating/hot water:** **SS Burners** ☎ 020 8330 7992. Your call will automatically divert to duty engineer.

**Lifts:** **PDERS** ☎ 020 7919 9800. Diverts call to out of hours team.

**General building repairs:** **Robbins Builders** ☎ 07739 469 400

**Fire alarms and detectors:** for problems with newly fitted systems in shared parts of the house call **Chameleon** ☎ 0844 822 2888 and leave a message quoting **ID No 847497** and your name, number and the problem. The duty engineer will call you back immediately.

**Anti-flooding pumps:** report to **Thames Water** any faults with the pumps they have installed in **Gliddon Road** properties to prevent flooding on ☎ 0800 056 625

**Gas leaks:** if you smell gas or suspect a gas leak please ring **Transco** at once on ☎ 0200 111 999

**TV aerials and entryphones:** faults with these are **not emergencies**. Please report them when we reopen on ☎ 020 8743 4422

## WINTER CALENDAR

– ALL EVENTS ARE FREE

Cologne Christmas Market

**Up to 23 December**

All day taste of a German Christmas from Southbank Centre to the London Eye, Sunday to Thursday, 11am-8pm, and 10am-10pm, Friday and Saturday

Crisis Carol Service

**Saturday 12 December**

Starts 6.30pm at Southwark Cathedral, London Bridge, SE1 9DA. Readings and performances by our members and backers with singing led by the Thames Philharmonic Choir. Service followed by mince pies and wine in the cathedral

Christmas with Dickens

**Wednesday 16 December**

Shoe Lane Library, Hill House, Little New Street, EC4A 3JR, from 12.30-1.15pm. Festive prose and poetry readings, with a Dickensian twist

New Year's Day Parade

**1 January 2010**

24th anniversary starts 12 noon from The Ritz in Piccadilly to Big Ben via Pall Mall, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall. More than half a million are expected at this London spectacular  
[www.londonparade.co.uk](http://www.londonparade.co.uk)