

# OpenHouse

The newsletter for Croydon Council tenants and leaseholders

## Over 70 new Croydon council homes built

**Over 70 families have moved into their brand new council homes in the latest £22m phase of Croydon's ambitious programme to increase the supply of affordable social rented properties.**

The 74 most recently built flats, family houses and bungalows have been funded with the help of a £2.2m grant from the Greater London Authority.

Most of the new properties are two-bed to four-bedroom houses, with 10% of them fully adapted for people in wheelchairs or tenants with other disabilities. Of the 74 new households, 34 had been homeless. The latest new-build council properties are in Fieldway ward, Coulsdon East, Shirley, New Addington, Heathfield, Kenley, Waddon, Bensham Manor and Broad Green.

The council is also currently drawing up an expanded programme of more than 1,000 new affordable and market-rate homes on sites across the borough by 2019. Details will be announced later this year.

Councillor Alison Butler, cabinet member for homes, regeneration and planning, said: "These latest new council homes show our commitment to delivering on our exciting plans to develop hundreds more affordable and market-rate properties in the near future.

"I'm particularly pleased that every new council property we build takes another family off our waiting list. This gets people out of unsuitable or temporary accommodation and lets them start to build a new life."

The latest scheme to be completed and let by the council is a mixed development of modern town houses and flats

on the site of the former job centre in Fieldway, featuring solar panels and other energy-efficient measures designed to reduce household bills.



Percy and Peggy Gray moved from their former council maisonette in New Addington because they were downsizing from a three-bedroom property and wanted somewhere to retire to. They now have a two-bedroom bungalow in Waddon.

Mrs Gray, a former school chef, said: "Where we lived before for 22 years we brought our kids up, and then we wanted to move away to start a new life; thanks to Croydon Council we got this. At the end of the day, we're really happy here."



**Council rent cut**  
see page 3



**Meet your new housing needs director** see page 6



**The latest edition of 2Views Mag inside**

## Open House going paper-free



**As a Croydon Council tenant or leaseholder, you receive a paper copy of this newsletter three times a year. The newsletter features important housing information and developments, related topics and big Croydon initiatives.**

The next (summer) issue of Open House and the accompanying 2Views Magazine will be published online, with paper copies available only if you ask to receive them.

The decision to go to an online version was recommended at a recent tenant and leaseholder panel and the reduction in the associated printing and distributions costs will contribute to the savings that we need to make over the coming years (see page 3).

The online version will look exactly the same as the one you receive in the post. If you choose to go paper-free we'll send you an email when a new version is online.

You can also register online to receive Open House by email: [www.croydon.gov.uk/openhouseonline](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/openhouseonline)

Alternatively, you will need to complete and return the enclosed survey to indicate your preference to receive a paper copy or the online version.

You can view current and past editions of Open House online [www.croydon.gov.uk/openhousenews](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/openhousenews). Newsletters will be also be placed on our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/croydonresidentinvolvement](http://www.facebook.com/croydonresidentinvolvement)



'Like' the resident involvement in Croydon Facebook page to keep up to date with the latest news and views. Visit [www.facebook.com/croydonresidentinvolvement](http://www.facebook.com/croydonresidentinvolvement)

**Would you like to contribute to Open House?**

[getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk)



**Contact the editor**  
I hope you enjoy reading *Open House*.  
If you have any comments to make please email: [communications@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:communications@croydon.gov.uk)

**Large print: to receive *Open House* and other housing information in large print, please call 020 8726 6100**

## Local jobs in new council deal

**Croydon carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers and kitchen fitters are set for a boost from a new council contract aiming to use local employees for almost all its work.**

From this April, the borough's 14,000 council homes and some schools will be maintained by Mulalley after it won a five-year general building works contract.

The contract, which could be extended for



another nine years if it goes well, includes a focus on employing Croydon-based subcontractors. Mulalley plans to give Croydon businesses 95% of its supply chain within five years, starting with local kitchen suppliers Price Kitchens and a target of giving 60% of its business to local firms in the first year. Visit [www.valuecroydon.com](http://www.valuecroydon.com) for more details.

The contract also includes upgrades to kitchens, bathrooms and roofs, plus extensions and outdoor improvements like new gates. It will save the council up to £2.5m a year that could be spent on other council housing improvements.

Mulalley has over 10 years' experience of working as a Croydon Council contractor for external decorations and upgrading kitchens and bathrooms.

Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed, deputy cabinet member for homes, regeneration and planning, said: "We look forward to Mulalley giving our tenants and leaseholders a top-quality planned maintenance service, boosting job opportunities for local people and saving the council up to £2.5m a year."

## Would you like to make a real difference to housing services in Croydon?

The council is always looking for new ways to engage with residents to find out what they think about the housing services we provide and help us to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction.

We have set up a range of service improvement groups to look at all key areas of the housing management service. Some groups are already operating, such as the ones for responsive repairs, tenancy and neighbourhood services, income and welfare support and leaseholder services, and another group will be formed to look at the planned maintenance service.

We are currently recruiting volunteers to join these groups. Interested residents will need to apply to become members in order to take part. You don't need any previous experience or knowledge; you just need to be interested in improving services and making Croydon a better place. Call Steve Driscoll on **020 8726 6100** or email [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk)

## Tollers help to clothe the community

**The Tollers residents' clothes bank at the Ellis Road meeting room has been up and running for a year now, and is open on the first Sunday of the month between 11.30am to 1pm.**

The idea for the clothes bank came about from a resident who wanted to give something back to the estate after falling on hard times. Other residents got involved and were able to help organise the clothes bank.

Since its opening the bank has helped many local residents, and most recently helped two expectant mothers get set up for the arrival of their new babies. The clothes bank was also able to help a family who were only able to afford school uniform but could not then buy outdoor clothes. Word has got round to the extent that now people come from far and wide to see what is on offer.

There is also the facility to exchange toys, and at Christmas a number of cuddly toys were given away.

Clothes are always needed, so if you feel that you are able to help, please contact Sarah on **07891 375570** or alternatively clothes can be dropped off at St. John's Church, Canons Hill, Old Coulsdon, CR5 1HA – donations are always welcome.

## ...so why do I need a bank account?

**Under Universal Credit, the Government is changing the way it pays benefits.**

A number of benefits you receive including housing benefit will be paid once a month and directly to your bank account.

This means that if you're getting help with your rent now, and it's being paid to directly to the council, this will stop. Instead your monthly Universal Credit payment will include the money for your rent and you'll need to arrange to pay it yourself.

To receive Universal Credit, you will need to have a bank or building society account, or an account with an alternative provider (you will need to have an account that can receive automated payments). There are also a number of advantages to using a bank account:

- Most employers insist on staff having one
- It's safer than carrying or storing a lot of cash
- Paying by direct debit helps you manage your priority household bills
- Some of the best telephone or utility deals are offered to people paying by direct debit
- You can withdraw money (subject to your balance) from cash machines when you need it.

For more details about choosing a bank account for your benefit payments, visit [www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/bank-account-for-uc](http://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/bank-account-for-uc)

To open an account, visit a branch of the bank or building society of your choice and ask for help. They have to identify new customers by law, and will explain what proof of identity they need to see, such as a

passport, driving licence or birth certificate. If you don't have these, the bank may ask for a letter confirming that you hold a tenancy with us, which we can help with.

It is usually free to set up a bank account, although sometimes you need a £1 deposit. If you've been turned down for a standard current account, a fee-free basic bank account might work for you. For more details visit [www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/basic-bank-accounts](http://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/basic-bank-accounts).

These also don't provide overdrafts (so you won't get into debt by spending more than you have) and won't charge you if a direct debit or standing order fails. That said, it's worth remembering that the company you're paying might still charge you.

Always make rent your top priority. If you don't pay your rent in full and on time you risk losing your home. Talk to your income officer if you are having trouble paying your rent or you need some debt advice. Your income officer can also help explain this information to you and offer advice on how you can prepare for Universal Credit or on managing your finances.



## Shrublands residents take action

**Residents from Shrublands are working with the council to help improve their area.**

At the Your Housing, Your Questions event held on the estate last August, residents told councillors and senior officers about a range of local issues, including fly-tipping and problems with caretaking and the repairs service. There were also discussions about planned improvements to local homes, as well as facilities like the play area. Councillors and staff also recently went on a walkabout in Shrublands (see right).

At a further meeting, the Shrublands Residents' Association was launched and the committee elected. It was also agreed to set up the Shrublands

neighbourhood action plan (NAP) which will help develop community-led projects on the estate and attract funding for such schemes.

A survey has now been conducted to obtain the views of the wider community and the results will be fed back to local residents when the neighbourhood action plan is officially launched. Residents and other stakeholders such as local businesses, the police and schools, will work with the council to agree actions to improve the estate.

If you would like more information about the Shrublands NAP, or are interested in helping deliver community projects generally, please contact Yvonne Anderson by phone **020 8726 6100** ext. **61567** or by

email [yvonne.anderson@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:yvonne.anderson@croydon.gov.uk)

If you are interested in finding out more about the Shrublands Residents' Association, please contact Steve Driscoll by phone **020 8726 6100** ext. **60463** or by email [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk)



# 1% rent cut for council tenants

Normally at this time each year, we write to let you know your rent for the coming year. Usually, rents are increased in line with inflation to cover the rising costs of running services. 2016/17 is going to be different - here's why:

The government has brought in a new law - all councils and housing associations are expected to cut their rents by 1% a year for the next four years. So, for example, if your current rent is £100 a week, from April your rent will be £1 less. That's about £50 back in your pocket over a year.

Although this is good news for many tenants, for the council it means almost £13m less income from rents over the next four years. We will therefore need to cut our spending on housing services and improving your homes from 2017/18. We are, however, some way towards achieving the next batch of savings:

- We spend about £11m each year on upgrades such as replacing kitchens and bathrooms. Our new general building works contract with Mullaley (see opposite, page 2) will save about £2m a year.
- We have almost completed our programmes of installing door-entry systems, carrying out fire safety measures and installing and modernising central heating systems and boilers in blocks of flats. This means we will only have to replace systems as they become old or for

issues as they arise.

- We are always looking at being more efficient and reducing our operating costs. For example, most customers can now use our council website to get information and doing things from paying bills to applying for services.

The rent cut is not the only new change which affects housing services being put into law by the Government. As we know more, and as we start to look at different ways of making savings, we will keep you up-to-date. If we have to make some tough decisions, we will engage with you to make sure that we do not lose the services which you most value.

From completing surveys to attending focus groups, there will be a range of opportunities over the coming months for you to give your views or work with officers to explore where savings can be made. To find out more, contact the resident involvement team via: [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk) or **020 8726 6100**.



## Take part with Housing ID

Sign up to our new housing involvement database (Housing ID) today. You'll help make a difference to your local community and help us improve housing services. You can choose:

- what interests you
- how you want to take part, and
- the times that are convenient for you.

It's not just about going to meetings; there are other ways to get involved too, such as checking services, estate inspections and surveys. For example, you could feed back to us each month on the standard of your neighbourhood services, or complete occasional telephone or online surveys. Any Croydon Council tenant or leaseholder, or resident of a council-managed estate, can register on the scheme.

To register or find out more, visit [www.croydon.gov.uk/res-involve](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/res-involve), call the resident involvement team on **020 8726 6100**, or email [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk)

## Involve – e-newsletter

To keep you up to date with the latest news and information from the resident involvement and scrutiny team, subscribe to Involve and receive the e-newsletter produced several times a year.

*Involve* details the range of opportunities available to you to find out more about your housing services, how to get involved and have your say on the delivery of your services. You can also find out what other tenants are saying and how the council is responding to your views.

Go to [www.croydon.gov.uk/subscribe](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/subscribe) to sign up to receive *Involve*. You can also subscribe to the *Your Croydon eBulletin* and receive a free monthly email that's full of news and information about your borough.

## Looking for Easter fun?

Don't be bored this Easter! Young people living on estates across the borough can look forward to things to do during the Easter holiday (28 March to 8 April).

Working in partnership with Play Place, we will be running our Play Rangers programme for young people aged five to 12 on 11 estates across the borough, including Tollers, Handcroft Road, Regina Road, Monks Hill, Green Lane, Waddon, Shrublands, New Addington, Croftleigh Avenue and Whitehorse Road and Longheath Gardens.

With lots of crafts, sports and big game activities on offer there will be plenty to keep the youngsters busy. All of these great activities are free. There is no need to book - so just come along and join in the fun!

Look out for details of our three-week summer programme - including Play Rangers sessions and our giant free Play Day event on 3 August at Addington Park. All of the activities (except outings) are free and run as part of the on-going Croydon play strategy.

If you would like to find out more about the programme of activities on your estate, email: [info@playplace.org](mailto:info@playplace.org)



## Whopping prizes for green-fingered gardeners

Enter this summer's garden competition and be in with a chance to win a huge £150 gardening prize!

So whether you have a single hanging basket, a couple of tubs of vegetables growing on your balcony, a small garden of flowers or you have been helping to keep the communal gardens in tip-top shape, you could win some fantastic prizes sponsored by our repairs contractor, Axis Europe, plus seeing your efforts featured in Open House.

Open to all council tenants and leaseholders, the competition categories are:

- Best garden
- Best hanging basket
- Best vegetable garden
- Best communal garden around a blocks of flats

Enter online at [www.croydon.gov.uk/gardeningawards](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/gardeningawards) or cut out and complete the entry form (left) and return it to the Tenancy & Neighbourhood Services Team, Zone 3C Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA.

The closing date for entries is **30 April 2016**. So don't delay! Please read the full competition terms and conditions before entering. Judging, by representatives from the tenant and leaseholder panel, will take place in July or August.

For more information contact Emeka Obiandu, neighbourhood inspector, on **020 8726 6100 ext.61587** or email [emeka.obiandu@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:emeka.obiandu@croydon.gov.uk)

## Grow your own food

Croydon tenants and leaseholders are being encouraged to learn how to grow their own fruit and vegetables in community gardens under a council-backed scheme.

The Master Gardeners initiative, which is part of Croydon Council's Food Flagship programme and is supported by national charity Garden Organic, trains residents how to grow their own produce and allows them to share tips with others.

If you would like to benefit from getting exercise outside, learn new skills and make friends while growing vegetables and fruit, contact Liza Scholefield on **07584 474778**, email [lscholefield@gardenorganic.org.uk](mailto:lscholefield@gardenorganic.org.uk) or visit [www.southlondon.mastergardeners.org.uk](http://www.southlondon.mastergardeners.org.uk)

### Housing garden competition entry form

#### I would like to enter or nominate:

First name	<input type="text"/>
Surname	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	<input type="text"/>
Tel. no.	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>

#### My details (if different from above):

First Name	<input type="text"/>
Surname	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	<input type="text"/>
Tel. No.	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>

#### Please tick all that apply:

Best garden	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best hanging basket	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best vegetable garden	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best communal garden around a block of flats	<input type="checkbox"/>

Closing date for entries 30 April 2016 



## Football coaching for young people with learning difficulties

**Over 30 young people with varying abilities are now receiving regular football coaching thanks to the partnership work between Croydon Council's sustainable communities team, the Crystal Palace FC (CPFC) Foundation and Croydon's Disability Youth Project.**

The football coaching sessions are for young people aged 11-18 with learning difficulties, disabilities and additional needs and take place on Mondays at Bensham Manor School youth club in Thornton Heath and on Tuesdays at Waddon Leisure Centre. Young people attend from across the borough and the groups are not exclusively for those who live or go to school in that area.

Apart from the fun and enjoyment these young

people gain from participating, other developments have seen them gain in confidence, improve their fitness levels, learn to be part of a team and even seen a few grow into potential leaders and future mentors to the younger members.

Through this project, one young man has discovered he has real ability and has been scouted to take part in CPFC Foundation's disability adult team whilst the two young men in the photo above (who were not really into football before the coaching began) have improved so much, they've been included in Bensham Manor School's football team.

Their efforts were recently rewarded with a trip to the Copper Box at the Olympic Park to take part in a 5-a-side football tournament. Representing Crystal

Palace they showed off their skills against other teams of similar ability including Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur, Charlton Athletic and Queens Park Rangers.

Read how this project has also helped to give a new lease of life to a 14-year-old youngster from South Croydon living with autism:

[www.cpfoundation.org/adam-williams-story](http://www.cpfoundation.org/adam-williams-story)

For further information on these football coaching sessions, and other youth club activities aimed at children and young people aged 8-25 with disabilities and additional needs, please email: [paul.funnell@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:paul.funnell@croydon.gov.uk) or telephone **07990 790183** or check out the link - [www.croydon.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs/sen-leisure](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs/sen-leisure)

## Call for mystery shoppers to improve housing service

**Are you interested in testing Croydon Council's housing services? Why not volunteer to join our resident mystery shopping team?**

Mystery shopping is a way of improving council-run housing services by getting a customer's point of view. Our recruits carry out a series of tasks such as visiting our receptions, contacting us by email or telephone, or checking out our website to test the service they receive and give feedback on how we are doing.

No previous mystery shopping experience is required, as free training is provided. This is a voluntary role but on completion of a successful mystery shop you will be placed in a prize draw for shopping vouchers.

If you would like to find out more, email [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk), call **020 8726 6100** or visit [www.croydon.gov.uk/housingmysteryshop](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/housingmysteryshop)

## News from the tenant & leaseholder panel

**Are you interested in speaking on behalf of the residents in your neighbourhood? Do you want to hear about future plans for your housing services and have your say on these?**

The tenant and leaseholder panel provides all tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to let both senior officers and councillors know what you think and what's important to you and your neighbours.

The panel meets four times a year in the council chamber at the Town Hall. Meetings can cover a range of topics including rents and service charge levels, repairs and improvement priorities, dealing with anti-social behaviour and caretaking and cleaning.

The panel last met in February when a wide range of topics were discussed. These included how the new Housing Bill might impact on housing budgets and your housing services, the role of the neighbourhood services officers, use of the mobile information bus and the future of this newsletter, which will become a digital e-edition from this summer with optional printing for those who request a hard copy (see page 1).

This resident-led panel is now looking for new members. If you feel that you could attend four evening meetings a year and speak up for your neighbourhood

then why not apply to become a member now?

Further information about the panel and how to apply to join can be found here:

[www.croydon.gov.uk/res-involve](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/res-involve) or you can discuss what's involved by ringing the resident involvement and scrutiny team on **020 8726 6100**. Agendas and minutes from previous meetings can be found here [www.croydon.gov.uk/tlpanel](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/tlpanel)



# New lifts for council flats

**Over 200 households in council flats across the borough will get brand new lifts from March under a £750,000 investment.**

As part of the council's annual investment in its housing, once installed the new lifts are set to last at least 25 years. The work will be done in two phases – the first from March to May, and the second during the summer months. Exact start dates and further details will be announced in advance letters to affected residents.

The blocks affected in phase 1 are:

- Arun Court, Howard Road
- Gordon Crescent
- Laxton Court, Parchmore Road
- Laurel Crescent

Contractors will work between 8am and 5pm on weekdays only, with any drilling limited to 9am to midday and 1pm to 4pm. The council expects its contractors to respect the community and environment they are working in, secure everyone's safety and value their workforces. The council also requires its housing repair contractors to follow a code of conduct that includes showing their identification before entering a property and clearing rubbish caused by the works.

All residents in phase 1 of the refurbishment programme have been invited to a consultation meeting to meet the contractor. We will work closely with tenancy and Careline (where applicable) to

carefully consider the needs of each resident on an individual basis.

Stephen Tate, the council's director of district centres & regeneration, said: "These new lifts will be a great addition to these council-owned buildings and will last for decades once we've installed them.

"We are very experienced at making sure we do all major upgrades with minimum disruption to our tenants and leaseholders, and we'll be in touch soon with everyone affected to explain how this will work."

Gordon Crescent

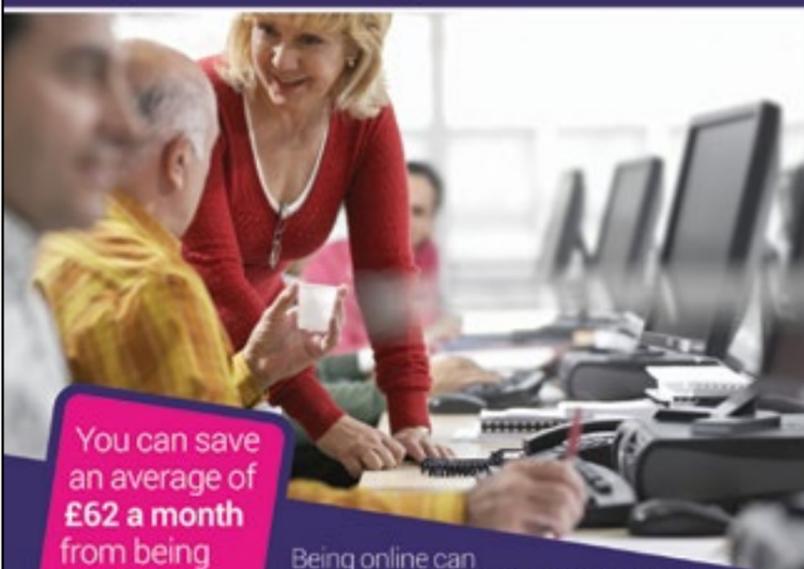


Arun Court, Howard Road



**GO ON Croydon**

Build your confidence online at your local digital zone



You can save an average of **£62 a month** from being online.\*

Being online can help you **take control of your money**, find the **best deals**, get in touch with friends and family, or search for a **new job**...

...leaving you more time and money to do what you love.

For the latest information on the Go ON Croydon Digital Zones visit [www.croydon.gov.uk/go-on-croydon](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/go-on-croydon)

**CROYDON**  
www.croydon.gov.uk

**GO ON UK**

\*Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index Report - Figure correct as of January 2016

## Could you help us check the housing services you receive?

**We are seeking new recruits to join our team of housing services inspectors. If you are council tenant or leaseholder this may be just the role for you.**

The housing services inspectors support the work of the housing scrutiny panel and similar groups to help them carry out detailed reviews of housing services. This is interesting and varied work as the inspectors can undertake a range of tasks to check that a service is being carried out the way it should be, or they may help interview staff and customers to find out how people feel about the service.

Unlike many of our other schemes,



housing services inspectors are not tied to going to meetings or taking part on a scheduled basis, they can choose what tasks they volunteer for and when they carry it out as long as it is within the agreed deadlines.

David Palmer (pictured) has been a housing services inspector for a few years. He says being on the scheme "...is hard work, but really enjoyable."

The work of the housing services inspectors is really important as it will help the scrutiny panel to gather residents' views about the service, which will be passed on to senior managers and will ultimately lead to service improvement.

If you would like to improve local services, learn new skills and gain valuable experience which could improve your employment prospects, visit our website [www.croydon.gov.uk/housinginspect](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/housinginspect) to find out more about becoming a housing services inspector, or call Tim Nash on **020 8726 6100**, or email us at [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk)

# New director talks council housing, community and Chelsea



**A few months after taking up his role as Croydon Council's director of housing need, Mark Meehan talks to Open House about the big challenges of his job, the council's future priorities on improving the borough's housing, and his pastimes.**

## What's your background and how did you get into the housing sector?

Anyone who says they deliberately set out to work in this sector probably didn't! In my case, I saw an advertisement in the Evening Standard and applied for a job with the old Greater London Council as a clerical officer. They could've put me in any department, but they put me in

housing, and I loved the sector so much I've never left it because I'm a great believer in improving people's lives.

I have worked in local government for 36 years mainly in London boroughs, plus a four-year spell as a special adviser on homelessness to the Department for Communities and Local Government. More recently, I was assistant director of housing needs at Ealing Council before arriving at Croydon in October.

## What attracted you to working in Croydon?

Career progression, obviously, but after six years making a difference at Ealing I wanted to move to a borough that provided a fresh challenge. Croydon provides it in spades, as it's not only a bigger borough with bigger issues, but there's a real opportunity to make a difference as the council undergoes a huge regeneration. That said, Croydon also has a lot of people who are vulnerable, on low incomes, or both – and my job is to make sure that we do everything we can so they don't feel left behind.

## What are your main priorities in the job?

We have 14,000 council homes, so managing these is a huge job on a day-to-day basis. This covers everything from collecting rent and sorting tenancy issues

to letting new homes. We also have a committed caretaking service, whose job it is to make sure people are happy where they live and feel safe.

We also get involved with tenants and leaseholders in our communities, with activities ranging from organising stay and play half-term sessions at both temporary and let accommodation to community safety initiatives, like our successful annual fire safety competition run with London Fire Brigade (see below).

## What are you working on right now?

I'm currently reviewing the way we allocate housing, with the goal of giving tenants and residents in temporary accommodation a greater say and involvement in the process of finding them somewhere to live. At the moment, the council makes all these decisions, and we want to be in a position where people are better informed and actively look for a home with our help. We'll be consulting the borough on this soon.

Our housing solutions service is actively working with private landlords to encourage more to take social tenants. We held a successful event in October to boost our numbers, and several of them were pleasantly surprised when we told them that we could get them a better

deal letting with us rather than going through a private agent. The tenant, crucially, also benefits because they end up with a home more quickly.

I'm also currently working on our response to proposed Government changes to housing law which might reduce the number of homes available to rent to social tenants. We will know more in the coming weeks and months what this means for Croydon, so this letter is important.

## What is your favourite anecdote that underlines why you work in housing?

There are several, but one of my favourites involved a dad who faced losing his home after losing his job. The housing officer chatted to him to see if there was an alternative solution, and found out that his wife was Finnish and the family had always wanted to return to Finland, so they arranged for the family to take up a private tenancy in Helsinki instead.

## What are your hobbies outside work?

I am a published author of a book on Chelsea Football Club and am writing another as we speak, and I love going to live music and comedy shows. I was also once a roadie for a heavy metal band!

## Benefit from our money advice

**Residents needing help with managing their finances, rent and benefit issues are being urged to contact the council's welfare advice service.**

The team assists council tenants with their rent and benefit issues and maximizes incomes so they can pay their rent, council tax and other housing costs.

We offer one-to-one confidential advice and support for our clients, many of whom frequently return for additional guidance and support. We are always ready to listen and are happy to help.

We work with all the external agencies such as the Department of Work and Pensions, Revenue & Customs, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Age Concern, MIND, councillors, MPs and GPs. We can help with:

- Completing complex benefit forms
- Referrals to an employment adviser
- Appeals
- Benefit checks
- Increase benefit entitlement
- Under occupancy charges
- Universal Credit
- Benefit cap
- Council tax issues
- Housing benefit disputes such as overpayments
- Food banks
- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

- Croydon Discretionary Support Scheme (CDS)

Part of our mission is to support staff and residents in developing more sustainable solutions, achieve financial independence, reduce poverty, homelessness and rent arrears with in the borough. We have generated over £345,500 in actual financial gains in welfare benefits for our customers.

### Who can we help?

If you are a council tenant and live in Croydon or you are living with one, we offer you FREE, specialised advice and support. If you are elderly or are unable to leave your home due to sickness or disability then we can arrange a home visit.

### Who to contact for an appointment

If you live in West Croydon, Thornton Heath, Norwood, Selhurst, Bensham Manor or Norbury area call Belinda Batt on **020 8726 6000** ext. **18161**

If you live in Ashburton, Croham, Selsdon, Woodside, South Croydon, Addiscombe, Coulsdon, Sanderstead, Purley, Kenley or Waddon area call Jarek Kopec on **020 8726 6000** ext. **61680**

If you live in Shrublands, Monks Hill, or New Addington area contact Jacqueline Olukunle on **020 8726 6000** ext. **65692**

## Guides win fire safety challenge

**A team representing the 1st New Addington Girl Guides have walked away as winners at Croydon's fourth annual all-ages Family Safety Challenge quiz finals.**

The challenge is run jointly with the council's housing services and was designed by the London Fire Brigade's Crossfire team. It makes learning about all aspects of household safety both interesting and fun and covers a variety of topics including fire safety and first aid. Alongside the quiz, which includes questions on everything from fire escape plans and the recovery position to internet safety and protecting against arson, there was also an emergency fire race, with competitors working against the clock to dress as fast as they could as if they had been woken by a fire alarm.

The challenge is growing in popularity every year, and the guides beat off stiff competition from 35 other teams to take part in the finals in a packed Braithwaite Hall in the council's Clocktower arts complex. In total some 1,300 people of all ages have this year taken part in 60 community events as part of the project.

Councillor Alison Butler, cabinet member for homes, regeneration and planning, said: "Fire safety is a serious matter – but we've managed to show how learning about it can be fun. It's been brilliant to see how many people

have taken part in the challenge this year, and congratulations to the guides for walking away with the first prize."

David Gill from London Fire Brigade's Crossfire team said: "Having a plan for what to do in the case of a fire and knowing some basic first aid are all life-saving skills, and this challenge helps us to teach hundreds of people every year how to stay safe in their homes. It's a great project and has undoubtedly helped prevent some potential tragedies.

"The aim of this is to illustrate that the awareness of safety in households is not always just the responsibility of the adults and that the whole family can work together to improve their awareness of safety issues."

The challenge is open to community groups based in or near any of Croydon's larger council housing developments and it is planned to run again next year.



# Council wins two awards for resident involvement

**Croydon Council and its involved residents have received two prestigious national awards.**

The first was from the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) for the council that had done most to encourage and support tenant empowerment.

Involved tenants and the council's resident involvement manager, Chris Stock, collected the award.

The judges said: "Croydon provides a range of involvement options to enable the maximum number of tenants to engage with the council. They have been able to make best use of new technology and social media to increase efficiency and tenant participation".

The second trophy went to the council's tenant scrutiny panel at the Customer Scrutiny & Inspection awards ceremony (right), which recognises the tenants who work in partnership with their landlords to audit their housing services.

Croydon was named Most Inspiring Scrutiny Panel – Local Authority. Croydon's panel recently reviewed the council's anti-social behaviour service and made 44 recommendations for improvements. The panel is now monitoring their implementation.



## Council tenants save money from Big London Energy Switch

**Hundreds of Croydon householders have saved up to £250 by switching to new gas and electricity companies under a council-backed scheme.**

Three times a year the Big London Energy Switch gets big firms like British Gas and EDF Energy to bid for new customers by offering deals not available on the high street.

The scheme works by getting council tenants and private householders to sign up and announce what their current gas and electricity rates are. Big London Energy Switch organisers then auction the customer's business. The

company that offers the best-value deal wins the chance to offer their business to the householder.

The council-backed scheme, which is also supported by the Greater London Assembly, has helped 1,449 Croydon households since it began a year ago. Most have saved at least £50 per year on what they were

paying before, with the average saving around £250.

Registration for the next Big London Energy Switch auction closes at midnight on Monday 16 May. For more information, visit the Big London Energy Switch part of Croydon Council's website [www.croydon.gov.uk/energyswitch](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/energyswitch)

The Big London  
**ENERGY**  
SWITCH

### Case study - Phil Young, aged 58 from Sanderstead

Building engineer Phil got the cheapest deal going when he moved from British Gas to E.On by using the Big London Energy Switch in 2014. He then used the switch again in autumn 2015, this time saving hundreds of pounds per year on an even better deal with E.On - electricity per unit was 10% cheaper and gas was 14% cheaper.

He said: "Last year I went in for the quote and found it was the cheapest I could get, and when the opportunity came up again this year I was absolutely astonished it came in cheaper. The switch was really easy – all I had to give was my meter readings. I have recommended it to lots of people."



### New uniform on patrol

**You will now be able to instantly recognise all of the council's neighbourhood safety officers (NSOs) by their new uniforms, with labelled purple jerseys and high-visibility vests.**

The street-based team switched to the new uniforms following the launch of the new service. The uniform unites NSOs with one consistent look and increases their visibility within Croydon's communities, as they patrol and problem solve issues of antisocial behaviour and environmental crime across the borough.

In October the council posted a leaflet to all tenants and leaseholders about the new NSO service and the best ways to report environmental crime and anti-social behaviour. This leaflet is also available on our website at [www.croydon.gov.uk/nso](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/nso). Further information can be found at [www.croydon.gov.uk/nso-outreach](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/nso-outreach)

### Helping you to find the right housing solution

Tenants looking to downsize or move to a larger home were invited to the council's January housing solutions event in New Addington.

Council staff were on hand to demonstrate home-swap websites and help tenants to register or widen their search area, as well as offer one-to-one advice on the assisted private purchase scheme which provides grants to help council tenants buy their own property.

The housing allocations team plans to hold similar events in the coming months for both tenants of over 40 years and those who have expressed an interest in moving to a smaller home.

For more information, email [hsg-rehousing@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:hsg-rehousing@croydon.gov.uk) or visit our website [www.croydon.gov.uk/housing-moves](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/housing-moves)

## Monks Hill, Ballards and Forestdale over 50s Club

**The Monks Hill, Ballards and Forestdale over 50s Resident Association is an independent community group. They have been running for 41 years and recently moved into the community room at the Monks Hill Sports Centre in Selsdon.**

The residents meet every Monday from 12 to 4pm to play bingo and have a chat over a cup of tea together with a range of other activities.

One of the more senior members of the over 50s Club is Jean Denning. Jean is the oldest member of the club and is 98.

Known to every one as Nanny Jean, she moved to Monks Hill in 1982 leaving behind The Glades in Shirley after sadly losing her husband and wanting to be close to her daughter Margaret and the rest of her family,



who all lived on Monks Hill.

Jean also has all her grandchildren and great grandchildren living around her, since moving closer to her family she has never looked back.

Whilst out shopping one day Jean met a lady called Beattie with whom she became friends. Sadly, Beattie is no longer around. Beattie introduced Jean to the over 50s clubs and persuaded her to join back in 1982. Jean has since enjoyed a lot of years at the club including serving as charity lady for a few years. She is still a valued member of the club, carrying out her duties which involves collecting money for the bonus ball which members play, enjoys taking part in all the activities including bingo, bake days and outings. Jean still goes on outings in her wheelchair assisted by her family, but has given up attending the club's annual holiday as she is not able to get about.

At 98 Jean still lives alone and cooks fresh meals for herself on a daily basis. Jean refuses to buy frozen meals. She also enjoys having meat and vegetables daily and making her own home made pie.

Jean still enjoys making sure she looks good by putting on her own make up and loves dressing smart, she regularly has her hair done. She is a wonderful strong lady that is looking forward to celebrating her 99th birthday with her family, friends and club members. If you would like to set up a community club for older people or families in your area and would like to find out more about how to go about this please contact the sustainable communities team by email: [sustainable.communities@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:sustainable.communities@croydon.gov.uk) or speak to a member of the team on **020 8726 6100**.

## New website to boost independent living

**Croydon residents wanting to keep active into old age are being urged to visit a new council-backed online directory offering thousands of links to social groups, care and support.**

Croydon Council has teamed up with national charity Age UK to provide information on 800 organisations and over 2,000 health, care and support services across the borough for the Careplace website.

Launched in Croydon this month and created by a partnership of seven other London councils, Careplace allows residents to search for everything from home help to sheltered accommodation on one website.

Croydon-based contacts range from a coffee morning in Shrublands and a tai chi group in Broad Green to providers of mobility aids, and also includes regional groups and providers with wider customer bases.

Croydon Council has contracted Careplace to help

support the borough's own independence strategy, which includes a focus on giving residents information and advice so they can make choices about how to meet their needs and live healthier lives.

Councillor Louisa Woodley, cabinet member for families, health and social care, said: "Croydon residents needing specialist care will always get the council's help, but we also want people to be independent and active for as long as they can.

"That's why Careplace's wealth of information is so useful - you don't need to be a computing whizz to get the hang of it, so why not give it a go?"

The Careplace directory will be constantly updated and improved by council staff and Age UK volunteers. Services, organisations or community groups wishing to add themselves to the directory can register online by visiting the Careplace website. For more information, visit [www.careplace.org.uk](http://www.careplace.org.uk)



## Join in with our free, fun and gentle exercise classes

**The exercise sessions at Bell Court are going from strength to strength.**

Local residents have come together to join in with the classes and Linda, the class instructor, has made the sessions a fun and enjoyable social get-together.

The classes aim to improve your stamina, strength, flexibility, balance, self-awareness and confidence. This will reduce the risk of falls and fractures and improve physical health and wellbeing.

The classes are friendly and easy to follow and you will have fun and meet new people at the same time as becoming fitter. One exercise incorporates a ball game where residents have to say each other's names before they can throw the ball to that person. This is a good way of getting to know people's names as well as their faces.

The sessions take place on Monday afternoons, between 1-2pm at Bell Court 38 Windmill Grove, CR0 2UQ. Everyone over 50 and people of all ages with a disability (not just Bell Court residents) are welcome to attend these FREE gentle chair-based exercise classes. There is no need to book, just turn up on the day.

The classes are very much appreciated by the residents who agree that the classes are fun and enjoyable. Purvis House resident Betty, 72, who attends every session, said: "My daughter says this is a good thing for me. It is so nice meeting new and fun people."

For more information about these classes, contact Theresa Rogers on **020 8726 6100** ext. **62065**.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2016

<b>Sheltered housing panel</b>	6 April 2016	2:30pm - 4:30pm (pre-meeting surgery 1.30pm - 2:30pm)	Community Space, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA
<b>Tenant and leaseholder panel</b>	26 April 2016	6.30pm	Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX
<b>Housing disability panel</b>	4 July 2016	2pm - 4pm (pre-meeting surgery 1.30 - 2pm)	Community Space, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA
<b>Tenant and leaseholder panel</b>	5 July 2016	6.30pm	Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX
<b>Sheltered housing panel</b>	13 July 2016	2:30pm - 4:30pm (pre-meeting surgery 1.30pm - 2:30pm)	Community Space, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA

Always check to confirm dates and venues, as these can change at short notice. You may also be able to reclaim travel costs to meetings by completing a claim form (supported with receipts). For any further information or to confirm meeting details, contact the resident involvement team by email [getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk), telephone **020 8726 6100** ext. **62954** or visit [www.croydon.gov.uk/housing/residents/whatsnew](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/housing/residents/whatsnew)

To keep up to date with the latest news and information from the resident involvement and scrutiny team and to find out more about your housing services and how to get involved and have your say, sign up to receive the e-newsletter - *Involve* at [www.croydon.gov.uk/subscribe](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/subscribe). You can also subscribe to *Your Croydon* weekly email full of news and information about your borough.