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# Celebrating our first year

\*We have detailed some of our new schemes, which were part of our promises, on page 2.



**W**e celebrated a year of Merton Priory Homes last month. Since the transfer of your homes in March 2010 we have been working hard to deliver the things we promised to you. This is a long process and we have lots still to do but we have made a good start.

When MPH was launched we made 91 promises to you, including launching

new services and various improvements. Within the first 100 days of MPH we had completed 18 of these promises. By our first anniversary we had completed 48. Many of the remaining ones are not things that can be achieved overnight, indeed some will take several years, but we are continuing to work hard to ensure they all happen.

Managing Director Pauline

Ford said: "We have come such a long way in the first year and I'm really proud of the efforts of MPH staff. But we will not become complacent. We are now much better at getting residents involved and your feedback is really vital in helping us to shape and improve our services. We will continue to listen to residents and deliver the things we have promised, and more."



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## Want to move home?

If you feel your current house is too big, too small or you just want to live in a different area then House Exchange could help you.

House Exchange is a mutual exchange service run by Circle. It helps thousands of people across the country move each year, either through a direct home swap or a three-way exchange. You can register your interest in the scheme now.

All Circle partners are members of House Exchange so you can be part of it too.

You can contact...

Email: [houseexchange@circle.org.uk](mailto:houseexchange@circle.org.uk) Website: [www.houseexchange.org.uk](http://www.houseexchange.org.uk)



house  
exchange



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## NOTE FROM EDITOR



Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of Home Matters.

You may have noticed that your Home Matters newsletter now arrives with your rent statement and in a smaller envelope. This, on top of other changes to your newsletter, has meant we have more than halved the cost of writing, printing and posting this publication to you. The money saved will be put towards our work to enhance the Life Chances of our residents.

You may also notice that Circle Anglia has recently become simply Circle. This small change to our brand name is being phased in over the coming months. Rest assured, the name change won't affect the work we do or your relationship with Merton Priory Homes.

# Highlights of our first year...

We promised you 91 things when MPH was launched, We have already achieved 48 of these. Some of the highlights of our first year include:



- Launching a gardening service for older, disabled and vulnerable residents who simply buy the plants etc for their garden and then sit and watch a gardener transforming their outside space.



- Setting up a mobile skip service for household bulk waste to ensure residents can dispose of larger items during our regular special collections.



- Giving £150 in decorating vouchers to new MPH tenants.



- Introducing a Handyperson service for elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents to help complete jobs around the house including putting up blinds or shelves, fitting locks or assembling furniture. We have also launched a special scheme for sheltered housing residents.



- Starting a £1million Community Fund which gives grants to local groups in order to help schemes that Enhance the Life Chances of residents.

- Introducing a mobile CCTV service to tackle anti-social behaviour hotspots.
- Setting up a residents' resource centre with computers and support to encourage resident involvement and employment.
- Starting a social fund for sheltered residents to organise a wide range of social activities - from meals to trips to the Moscow State Circus.

**For more details on any of these schemes call us on 0300 500 3000.**



## Funding for your community

**D**o you have an idea for a project that will benefit your area?

Merton Priory Homes has a £1million Community Fund to provide grants for projects that Enhance the Life Chances of residents and their communities.

### Empowering Communities Grants:

Up to **£3,000** are available for small projects, equipment and one-off events. The grants are for residents and small local groups or organisations for projects that benefit Merton Priory Homes residents and communities.

### Who Can Apply?

- Residents or tenants associations
- Community groups and self-help groups
- Voluntary organisations
- Social enterprises



If you would like help with your funding ideas, our Community Fund Coordinator, Adam Match can work with you to help you apply for a grant. Contact him on 0300 500 3000 or email [mphcommunityfund@circle.org.uk](mailto:mphcommunityfund@circle.org.uk)

**The closing date for applications is 5pm on Friday 20 May 2011.**

Application packs are available by post, from our offices or via the website at [www.mertonprioryhomes.org](http://www.mertonprioryhomes.org) along with the full list of projects that are currently funded.

*“The Empowering Communities Grant has enabled us to bring our new show to Merton Priory Homes residents, allowing them to come together, learn about the activities we offer and try them out! Above all, this funding will allow them to have fun, make new friends and socialise with their neighbours.”*

**– Attic Theatre Company, who received £3,000 to provide drama activities for older people.**

# Your rent increase



**W**ith this issue of Home Matters you will have received your rent statement. We wrote to you a few months ago to explain why your rent is going up from this month. There are several reasons why your rent has increased, including the recent 2.5% VAT rise, inflation and the move towards target rents as set out by the Government. This is a move to bring rents to the same level for similar homes in all areas by 2012. Other housing associations and councils across the country will also be increasing rents for these reasons.

The same things have been taken into account when deciding your rent this year, as in other years when Merton Council was your landlord. The rent increase is nothing to do with the improvements we are making to homes and estates. If the transfer to Merton Priory Homes had not happened, the rent increase would have been exactly the same. We need to increase our rents to ensure that we can continue to provide better homes and communities for all Merton Priory Homes residents. We continue to offer support and financial advice to residents, especially those

struggling during the current economic climate. We recently held drop in surgeries on our estates to offer support and advice. If you are facing debt or rent arrears please get in touch with us so we can help. We can also put you in touch with Merton Council's Welfare Benefits team who can assist by ensuring you are receiving any benefits you are entitled to. We also run Money Talk events which bring together many agencies that can help you, including the Citizens Advice Bureau. **For enquiries about your rent call 0300 500 3000.**

# Housing fraud

**W**e take illegal subletting and unauthorised occupation of MPH homes very seriously. Residents are not allowed to rent out their home to someone else and live elsewhere. Unauthorised occupation can be anything from squatters moving in to empty homes to family members moving in to a relative's home if they have died and automatically claiming rights to remain without going through the correct application system.

Housing fraud is also being committed if a resident is renting their garage or parking space, has returned to work but is still claiming Housing Benefit, or has allowed an additional person to move in without notifying us. In every case we will investigate and take legal action to take back the property. We take housing fraud extremely seriously and need your help so if you believe it may be taking place please get in touch with us.

**You can report housing fraud to us via phone on 0300 500 3000, speaking confidentially to your housing officer or emailing [contactmph@circle.org.uk](mailto:contactmph@circle.org.uk)**



# Helping *you* to manage *your* money

**S**taying in control of your finances is always an important issue. In times of job uncertainty many families may feel that they need a little help to sort out their finances or discuss money concerns. There is a range of financial help on offer. The Consumer Financial Education Body (CFEB) offers a wide range of free, impartial handbooks,

guides, resources and online information, tools and calculators to help you with your money. They are all part of the Money Made Clear campaign. For more details about the free help available visit [www.moneymadeclear.org.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.org.uk) You can download the guides you want from the website, or order printed copies which will be posted to you.

## >>Top tips:

- >>Always... shop around. Make sure you compare the products as well as prices to get what is right for you.
- >>Keep... a spending diary so you can see where your money goes and where you can make savings.
- >>Check... your credit report. It's easy to do and if your credit rating is wrong you could be paying too much for credit.
- >>Check... that you have enough insurance for your home, but are not over or under insured, or paying twice for the same thing.
- >>Thoroughly... check all of the details on your bank and credit card statements as mistakes can happen.



## Funds to support projects for young people

**O**ur Youth Forum was launched last summer and now has ten members aged 12–19 representing the views and ideas of young people living in MPH properties.

The group gives young people a chance to get involved and shape where they live and the services they receive.

Members can also complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Arts Award, join fun activities and share views with young people from other Circle partners.

In December the MPH Youth Fund launched. Young people applied to fund projects across the borough. The fund

was oversubscribed and all applications were from young people living in MPH properties, with partner organisations to support their projects.

Partner organisations were Uptown UK, Acacia Adventure Playground, Phipps Bridge Youth Club, We Make a Change Ltd and the South London African Women's Organisation.

A panel of six youth forum members heard presentations about each proposal from the young applicants and funding was agreed for five projects, totalling £12,906. Details of the projects and how to get involved will be posted on our website.

# Decent Homes Update

**O**ur contractors and the major works teams are in Mitcham, Morden and Wimbledon carrying out the Decent Homes programme.

Internal works have been taking place in the cold, wet winter months. We are now collecting survey data on external works including redecoration of external walls, replacement roofs, windows and rainwater goods including water butts. This will be carried out in the warmer months.

In the first two months of the Decent Homes programme, since January, we have carried out work to around 200 homes. It's been good to hear your feedback. We've received compliment letters from some residents who are happy with the finished product and the service. We have achieved 100% resident satisfaction on kitchen, bathroom and electrical works so far and aim to maintain this as we continue.

If you are on the list, we appreciate how difficult the upheaval of a new kitchen and bathroom may seem but we are here to help. If you are anxious about the works call our Resident Liaison Officers, their details are on the bottom of the letters we sent out, or call 0300 500 3000 and ask for your area team member.

The second year programme of Decent Homes work will be published on the website and all residents included will be contacted.

*We are committed to being green. We asked our contractors, Apollo, how they would help us with this. They bought electric cars which they now use to travel to and from your homes where possible. As well as helping the environment, the lower running costs mean more savings for Apollo and MPH too.*

## Fancy joining our youth forum?

**I**an Squires, Chair of MPH Youth Forum, receives a certificate from Peter Luxford of MPH, for his training on How to be a Good Chairperson.

Merton Priory Homes Youth Forum meets six times a year at The Grange. If you are aged 12–19 and live in an MPH home why not come along, influence decisions on spending the £20,000 budget for the Forum and have some fun?

To join the Youth Forum call Penny Rowland-Hill on 0300 500 3000 or email [getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk](mailto:getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk) for an application form.



## News from the Resident and Service Users Panel



Circle's Resident and Service Users Panel (RASP) brings together representatives from across Circle. We have members from every housing association and from the service providers Invicta Telecare and Circle Support.

As a result we have a wide range of experience and knowledge to call upon when we consider policies and documents put forward by Circle. Our job is to make an input into and comment on these policies from the point of view of the Group's many customers.

At the moment we

are looking at the dramatically changing Government housing policies and Circle's response to them. We also keep an eye on the performance of every part of the Group, including important issues like repairs and maintenance and gas safety.

But we don't just sit in meetings, we have a programme of visits to every part of Circle, so that RASP members can get a feel for what each area is like and if there are any problems or other issues which we need to know about. For example, there's a lot of difference

between housing in rural East Anglia and Birmingham or London.

Our views are fed directly back through the structures of Circle and we are expected to give our views on the Group's developing policies. Every part of Circle provides opportunities for residents and service users to get involved and have their voice heard. RASP will not replace those important measures but, as it involves people from right across the group, RASP has a vital role to play.

**Alison Hill**  
RASP chair

## Warning on electricity top-ups

Only buy credit for your pre-pay electricity meter key from official outlets such as the Post Office, PayPoint or Payzone, or you'll end up paying twice.

If anyone offers you energy top-ups on the doorstep, they are trying to involve you in criminal activity.

Don't be fooled. Energy companies can identify homes using electricity but not paying for it.

To find out more visit [top-upsafe.com](http://top-upsafe.com) or contact Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06.



## Leaseholders and Shared Owners



## Estimated Service Charges 2011/12

All leaseholders and service charge paying freeholders should have received their estimated service charges for the financial year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. The estimate includes a list of the services you must pay for (as detailed in your lease/service charge deed) and your individual contribution.

If you are required to pay ground rent, a separate notice will be included and the amount is automatically collected within your service charge account.

Your estimate will show you the amount you are required to pay. We will include a standing order

If you have any queries relating to your estimated service charge account please call the Leasehold Management Team on 0300 500 3000 between 9am and 5pm on weekdays or email [contactmph@circle.org.uk](mailto:contactmph@circle.org.uk)

form which you should send direct to your bank in time to ensure the first payment is made no later than 15th May 2011.

Your instalment plan for 2011/12 will be shown on your estimate. When calculating the instalment plan for 2011/12 any credit showing on your account will be automatically deducted from the estimated amount shown.

If the account shows an arrear it should be settled separately. The easiest way to pay an arrear is to call 0300 500 3000 and ask for the Leasehold Management Team, who will take your payment over the phone using your debit or credit card details.

## Bulky Waste Collection Service



One of the promises we made when MPH was launched last year was to introduce a Bulky Waste Collection Service for residents to dispose of large unwanted items.

This service has proved popular with residents and so far more than 750 tons of household items have been collected. These include old sofas, mattresses and

cookers which have now been safely disposed of.

Estates normally have scheduled collections every three months, while homes which are not on an estate can arrange to have two items collected every three months by giving us a call.

For more information about this service check our website or call us on 0300 500 3000.

# Mary's story



*When pensioner Mary Walsh lost everything in a house fire, she was overwhelmed by the support she received from MPH staff.*

**T**he fire started in her neighbour's home but also destroyed Mary's house and she lost everything, including her clothes, jewellery and treasured photos.

MPH housing officer Jackie Jackson and Jane Sewell, Sustaining Tenancy Officer, arranged for Mary to stay in a local hotel.

"The fire started at the end of the day and the housing officers were straight around. They gave me their mobile phone numbers in case I needed anything during the night. They called my doctor and arranged for my medication. The next morning, they went shopping for me, buying the essentials like a toothbrush, soap, shampoo, clothes and shoes.

*"I was dreadfully upset. My home was gone, all*

*my possessions including personal mementos and the photos of my late husband and my six children had gone too. Having the friendly, helpful staff from MPH to support me as things return to normal has helped enormously."*

*"I stayed just over two weeks in hotels and could not return home as it was gutted by fire and water damaged. There was an empty property a few houses away in Cranmer Farm Close. It's the same layout as my old home and I am still living in the same friendly neighbourhood with the community I know and care about."*

Jackie and Jane put her in touch with the Handyperson Team, who helped Mary settle in by delivering and assembling furniture and

doing jobs. They repainted much of the inside of the home.

*"At my age, there is no way I can paint or paper and the handyperson team has done a magnificent job. I tell them what I want done and provide the materials and they get on with the job. They are a fun, friendly bunch to have around the house. The handyperson team have been wonderful. I would recommend them to anybody."*

The Handyperson Service is free to older and vulnerable tenants. They can decorate up to two rooms, hang curtains, assemble furniture or complete other tasks that are usually the tenant's responsibility.

For details call 0300 500 3000.

## Green Doctor Scheme:

**W**e are funding a scheme which can help you reduce your energy bills. The Green Doctor can carry out a free energy assessment at your home and install energy saving devices which can

reduce your heating, energy and water bills by up to £100 per year as well as lowering carbon emissions. Our funding is limited and offered on a first come first serve basis.

To book an appointment call **0300 500 3000**. More details about the Green Doctor scheme are available at [www.groundwork.org.uk/london](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/london)

## Get that Job

**A**re you out of work and lacking in confidence? Help is available for you to get that job! Merton Priory Homes is running workshops providing support in confidence building, CV writing, job search techniques, interview skills and much more so that our residents get the skills they need to get the job they want.



### Got a business idea?

Have you got a business idea that can benefit your local community socially or environmentally? We can guide you through the steps of setting up and provide practical support to get you started.

For details contact the Community Regeneration Team on 0300 500 3000 email [mphcommunityregen@circle.org.uk](mailto:mphcommunityregen@circle.org.uk)

# All change on the Board



Jenny Mills

The management Board of Merton Priory Homes is made up of residents, council representatives and independent members. There have recently been some changes to who sits on the Board as the first term of office for Chair and Vice Chair came to an end.

Jenny Mills became chairman of Board in February. She has been an independent board member and has a range of business and housing experience.

She said: "I am very excited about leading the MPH Board in what promises to be a period of change for the better for our tenants and leaseholders.

"There will be many challenges to overcome, the comprehensive spending review to name just one, but we will have the support of Circle to help us overcome any problems. As Chair of one of the largest Circle partners, I am committed to ensuring that MPH's voice is heard in Group discussions so that we are able to influence decisions.

"We have a very full program of redevelopment and improvements to our homes over the next few years and we are in the process of improving communication with all our customers. Contacting us about rent, service charge matters or repairs will be much easier and quicker.

"I am very committed to making sure that the views of tenants and leaseholders are heard by the Board," said Jenny.

Jenny will lead the Board for the next three years and has taken over the role from Ann Moyies who decided not to stand for reselection due to personal and health reasons.

Robin Bainton, a leaseholder, continues as Vice Chair following a selection process and Moses Salisu from Harlands Estate has been appointed as a new tenant board member.

MPH MD Pauline Ford said: "I am delighted to welcome Jenny to her new role and look forward to working with her. Ann has done a great job as MPH's first Chair and it is good news that she will remain on the board."



Outgoing chair of the Board Ann Moyies

## New policy guides

From April many of our policies will be available in a new easy to read key information sheet.

These sheets are available from our website at

[www.mertonprioryhomes.org](http://www.mertonprioryhomes.org) and also on request in our reception areas.

Sheets available include: *Pets, Anti-Social Behaviour, Asbestos, Domestic Violence, Gas Safety,*

*How Your Rent Is Set, Mutual Exchanges, Paying Your Rent and Fire Safety.*

Further key information sheets for all of our policies will be produced throughout 2011.

## Burglary



Burglary is a concern to all of us and we work closely with partners including the police to try and prevent it. Many burglaries can be avoided with forethought and basic crime prevention steps.

House burglars target their victims where they think they will be able to take the most property with the least risk.

To help reduce the chances of being burgled;

Leave lights on during dark afternoons and evenings if you are out, keep sheds locked as burglars often steal tools and then use them to break into homes, keep doors and windows locked, don't leave electronic items on show, keep communal doors locked and keep an eye on your neighbours' homes too. If you see anything suspicious call the police.

For advice on preventing burglary and other crime prevention help, visit the police website at [www.met.police.uk/crimeprevention](http://www.met.police.uk/crimeprevention)

## Responsible Dog Ownership

You asked us to help encourage responsible dog ownership in our area. We are working with Merton Council and the animal charity The Blue Cross, to put together roadshows around our estates this year. At the events dog owners can micro-chip their pets free of charge, which means if the dogs are lost they can quickly and easily be reunited with

their owners. Tips will also be available on how to look after your pets. The Bag It Bin It campaign will run as part of the roadshow, which urges dog owners to dispose of dog waste in a responsible manner. Details of the roadshows will be put on contact boards and on our website nearer the time. For more details call Rhian Courtney on 0300 500 3000.



# Digital Switchover

Television in the UK is going digital and the existing analogue TV signal for the London area will be switched off in 2012.



**M**any residents receive their TV signals through communal aerial systems provided by MPH. If these systems cannot convey digital TV signals, residents' in-home digital receivers (e.g. set-top boxes or digital TV sets) will not work and residents will not be able to watch TV unless they have an independent

aerial, dish or cable/broadband connection.

Our Decent Homes contractors are now checking the existing aerial installations to see what upgrade work is required.

Before we decide how to carry out the work, we will ask residents to help us select the most suitable type of

digital TV system to meet your needs. A Working Group has been set up which will include representatives from our Resident and Leaseholder Forums. This working group will look at the options to ensure residents who have communal systems continue to have access to a wide range of TV channels and services.

If you have any questions call 08456 50 50 50 or visit [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk)

**digitaluk**

## Estate Inspections

**E**state inspections allow us to work with residents to find out any issues or problems in local communities and we rely on residents getting involved and meeting with us to carry these out.

You said you wanted us to do more of them so we have increased the number of estate inspections from 18 to 32 of our estates. We have also increased the number of inspections from two to three annually.

Inspections will now take place at:

Abbey Orchard	All Saints*
Baron Court	The Beeches
Bushey Court	Bygrove & Newborough Court*
Brickfield Caravan Site	Cherry Trees
Eastfields	Edinburgh Court & Four Acres
Elm Nursery	Grove Farm
Harlands Estate*	Hatfeild Mead
High Path*	Laburnum
The Lawns	Portland & Lewis Road
Meretune Court	Moffat Curt
Morden House	Poplar Court
Parkleigh Court	Phipps Bridge*
Pitt Crescent	Ravensbury
Sadler Close*	Shelly & Byfield*
St Helier	Sycamore Court*
Watermead	West Barnes Lane*

\* Notice boards on the estate will give details of dates and times

Residents can attend estate inspections with key housing staff to discuss local issues around their area. To attend an inspection in your area call the Consultation & Communications Team on 0300 500 3000 or email [getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk](mailto:getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk)

## Street Properties & Small Block

**M**erton Priory Homes (MPH) is launching a new scheme from April for all residents living in street properties and small blocks to apply for funding from a dedicated annual budget of £50,000. This new initiative can be used to make improvements to:

- your homes or gardens;
- improve internal or external communal areas;

- support local activities to strengthen resident communities;
- enhance home security

The main criteria is that any proposal must benefit an MPH resident, or residents at the address where the application comes from or includes.

Applications will be accepted from MPH residents living in a street property or small block. Application packs have been sent to these residents.

## Large estates Allocations Fund (LEAF)

**W**e are pleased to announce the launch of the large estates allocation fund (LEAF), starting from April. LEAF is an annual budget of £211,000, to 22 of our largest estates across the borough, which can be used for local improvements to communal areas, community activities or extra services for the estate. How this fund will be used will be decided by residents. LEAF is a transfer promise following the ownership and management of the council homes transferring to MPH.

The amount that each estate receives will vary from £3,000 to £38,000 depending

on the number of tenants living on the estate. This amount is in addition to any planned works being carried out from the Estates Environmental Improvement Budget and the Decent Homes Improvement programme to homes and estates.

All residents will be consulted on the proposals before any improvements/activities are carried out.

For details email [getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk](mailto:getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk) or contact the consultation and communications team on 0300 500 3000.

## Estate Champions

**W**e would like residents that live on our largest 22 estates without any Residents' Association (RA) representation to volunteer to become an Estate Champion to improve their local area.

Estate Champions are residents who will work closely with the Consultation &

Communications Team providing a formal link on the estate, to discuss local issues and work with us on how the Large Estates Allocations Fund (LEAF) can be used.

For details email [getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk](mailto:getinvolvedmerton@circle.org.uk) or contact the consultation and communications team on 0300 500 3000.

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