

# Talkback

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Spring 2024

## Why not volunteer?

Volunteers make our communities happier, healthier and safer.

As a volunteer, you get the chance to give something back to your community, pass on your skills, meet new people, gain confidence and learn something new – all at times that suit you. Volunteering also looks great on your CV and could help you find work.

Below you can read about four organisations offering volunteering opportunities. Let us know if we should include others in our next issue.



### Friends of Foxley

The Friends of Foxley  
([friendsoffoxley.co.uk](http://friendsoffoxley.co.uk))

work with Croydon Council to protect and manage Foxley Wood local nature reserve in Purley. If you enjoy fresh air and light exercise, you are welcome to take part in one of their work days, with tools and equipment provided – any time you can spare will be appreciated. They also need volunteers to record wildlife and are keen to involve people with skills in fundraising, advertising, IT and liaising with others.

Email Chris Parker at:  
[chrism\\_parker@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:chrism_parker@hotmail.co.uk),  
or phone 020 8668 3302.



### Friends of Darrick and Newstead Woods

The Friends of Darrick and Newstead Woods work with Bromley Council and their contractor, idverde, to help conserve, maintain and protect this nature reserve. They meet every Thursday morning to complete a range of tasks led by a ranger. You are welcome to join, whether you want to take part in work sessions or just enjoy spending time in the reserve.

A Keniston resident told us:  
"I joined and did some lovely litter picking today! They are a lovely team led by the ranger. We chose whatever job we liked and the litter pick was such a lovely walk around the woods, as you get to chat with a 'partner' in pairs.

"It is such a lovely thing to do if you are feeling isolated. We have tea, coffee, biscuits and a chat afterwards – all out in the fresh air and literally in the community centre car park!"

Call 01689 862815, or email [FODNW@outlook.com](mailto:FODNW@outlook.com), for the site manager. (Online at: [friendsofdarrickandnewsteadwoods.com](http://friendsofdarrickandnewsteadwoods.com))



### GoodGym



GoodGym is a voluntary organisation with volunteers who run, walk and cycle to help local community organisations, and isolated older people, by doing practical tasks. Anybody can join, no matter their fitness level – all you need is a pair of trainers. You can attend as often or as little as you like.

Once you're a member they'll do their best to help you achieve your fitness goals. They also organise social events like parties and races, so that you can get to know other members in this vibrant community.

To join GoodGym check out their website at [www.goodgym.org](http://www.goodgym.org), or email [getinvolved@goodgym.org](mailto:getinvolved@goodgym.org)

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## Blooming Bickley

The grounds at White Meadows and Southwood Close will soon be blooming with shrubs and flowers, thanks to a contribution from our Better Homes, Better Neighbourhoods fund.

We set up the fund to provide a pot of money for improvements to our housing schemes.

Our Bickley gardener has been changing the flower beds – replacing old rose bushes with wooden planters made from railway sleepers.

The next stage will be to plant shrubs and flowers to create an attractive display once they are in full bloom.

If you have improvement ideas for your scheme, please tell us. You can join us on a walkabout at your scheme or you can speak to your Housing Officer.

## Why not volunteer?

*Continued from front page*



### Volunteering in Crawley

Crawley Community Action ([www.crawleycommunityaction.org/volunteering](http://www.crawleycommunityaction.org/volunteering)) helps to match willing volunteers with the local organisations that need them. Phone Volunteer Manager, Emily Thorpe on 07716 641409, or email [emily.thorpe@crawleycommunityaction.org](mailto:emily.thorpe@crawleycommunityaction.org)

## Anti-social resident evicted

We recently evicted a resident on the grounds of high-level anti-social behaviour.

As a social landlord, eviction is always a last resort for Keniston. But the resident involved had repeatedly caused noise nuisance, had been threatening, abusive and violent, was misusing drugs and had let their home get into a poor condition.

The eviction was the result of a two-year investigation. Two years sounds like a long time to resolve things, but it is not unusual. It can take several months to get to court after serving a Notice of Seeking Possession. We also need victims to be willing to give formal evidence, or be court witnesses.



If you are suffering from anti-social behaviour, remember to report criminal activity to the police, as well as telling your Housing Officer about it.

If your problem is less serious – for example, a neighbour playing loud music at unreasonable times – we encourage you to try talking to them about it first.

## Evicted for non-payment

Over the past 12 months, we have had to evict two households for not paying their rent.

We always try to help people to keep their tenancies, so we did not take this action lightly.

We handle missed payments and arrears firmly but fairly. However, we depend on this income to meet the costs of managing and maintaining your homes.

If you are struggling, contact your Rent Income Officer as soon as possible for help and advice. Don't let the arrears mount up or ignore our messages, or you may risk losing your home.

### Discretionary Housing Payment

If you get Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit, you could apply online



for a Discretionary Housing Payment from your local council. If successful, you will get a temporary rent top up, usually for six months, that you don't have to repay.

If you need help to apply, contact your Rent Income Officer. Email [janlewis@kenistonha.co.uk](mailto:janlewis@kenistonha.co.uk) if you live in Darrick Wood, Whites Meadow or Southwood Close. Email [nataliemarchant@kenistonha.co.uk](mailto:nataliemarchant@kenistonha.co.uk) if you live at another of our schemes.

# Survey results: more details

**We are uncovering very useful information, as we look in more detail at the results of our latest Acuity satisfaction survey.**

We are pleased to report that many of the more negative things you had to say involved issues that we have already resolved since the survey went out.

Two new issues stand out. Firstly, there were a number of drug dealing reports that we were unaware of. We are taking this up with the Safer Neighbourhood Team – but you should also report this crime directly to the police.

Secondly, some of you were unhappy with the condition of your neighbour's property and garden. Our Housing Officers will be taking action.

## Positive comments

Many of you also said great things about Keniston, which we were pleased to read. For example:

- I can't thank Keniston enough, they are an amazing housing association. Customer service is outstanding and all aspects of repairs. The team are amazing.
- I feel satisfied that Keniston listens to and deals with ASB and neighbourhood problems to the best of their ability.
- They are excellent, really good. I've been here 40 years.

Thank you to everyone for your feedback. Three lucky residents who completed the survey were winners of shopping vouchers.

Steve from Byers Court said: "What a nice surprise it was to receive the

£100 shopping voucher for winning the prize draw. Keep up the good work and thanks."

Danielle from Whites Meadow said: "I was thrilled to receive my voucher. I really need a new oven, so shall be using it towards that."

*Pictured: John from Sunningdale, our third voucher winner.*



We will provide further updates in the next issue on your survey and resident meeting feedback.

# Your complaints feedback

**We continue to receive a low number of formal complaints – just nine in the year from April 2023 to March 2024 (compared to eight for the previous year).**

Three complaints were about repairs, five about housing management and one about our handling of anti-social behaviour. We fully upheld one of the repairs complaints and partially upheld a second. None of the other complaints were upheld.

In our tenant satisfaction survey, a larger number of residents said

they had complained. This may, for example, be due to residents saying they complained when they raised a repair. But this would be recorded as a service request, not as a formal complaint.

The Housing Ombudsman Service has published its latest complaints handling documents and we will be legally obliged to comply with them from 1 April 2024.

Board member Stephen Hoad has taken over as Member Responsible for Complaints. He is making sure the Board gets regular details about the complaints you make and reviewing the information before each quarterly meeting.

## How to complain

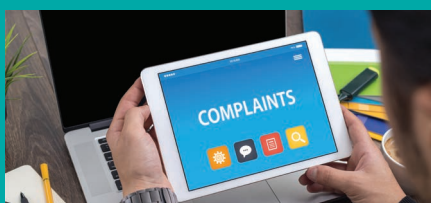
You can complain by email, phone,

or letter, meet us face to face, use our social media or the contact form on our website. Or you can call the office to ask for a form – on paper or by email.

If, at any stage, you aren't happy with our responses, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service in the following ways:

- Online: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint)
- Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- Phone: 0300 111 3000
- Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Check our website, or contact us, for more details about Keniston's complaints process.



# Board member profile: Mariola Viegas

We recently welcomed three new Board members, including Mariola Viegas.

Mariola Viegas is an architect and construction professional, with experience in the public and private sectors. Her career has centred on architecture, design and project management.

Ever since Mariola was 10 years old, she has been fascinated with buildings and drawing plans; often drawing and designing her own houses and buildings.

She says: "I love how people use buildings. My primary interest is in social housing and seeing how spaces are created for people to live in and to build communities."

## Working with Keniston

This is Mariola's first Board position, but her work has often involved interacting with boards. "I was excited when I saw the advert. I love what I do and, as I have a passion for social housing, I wanted to do something to support the sector and make a positive impact. I feel that, in a smaller organisation, I can have a meaningful input and see the difference made."

"Everyone has been so welcoming. There is a good mixture of people on the Board, all with their own strengths and experiences. I am looking forward to learning more from them, while also supporting the Board with the skills I have."

Mariola has also joined Keniston's Development and Growth Committee. "It has been really interesting to see feedback from residents in the recent Acuity survey and the estate action plans. It is also great to see that, at Keniston, there is a close

relationship and understanding about the housing stock and the residents."

## Greatest achievements

"Becoming an architect was a dream of mine since very young. It was a long and hard journey to become qualified and I couldn't have done it without the support of my family."

It took Mariola nine years of study and work placements to achieve the full qualification to become an architect. However, nowadays, industry leaders are keen to make architecture more accessible and a desirable career for anyone with a passion. Many more apprenticeships are available and there are now companies providing internships, and facilitating part-time study and graduate programmes.

"Another proud moment was completing a 100 kilometre walk for The Gurkhas Challenge," Mariola told us. "I did this with a group of girlfriends, walking from Petersfield to Brighton."

"The average completion time was 30 hours, and we did it in 29 hours and 50 minutes; a very



respectable time. The Gurkhas completed it in 10 hours, but they were jogging and running, unlike most people!

"Again, I couldn't have done this without the amazing support of friends and family, who came along to make sure we had food, drinks and snacks along the route."

## Time out

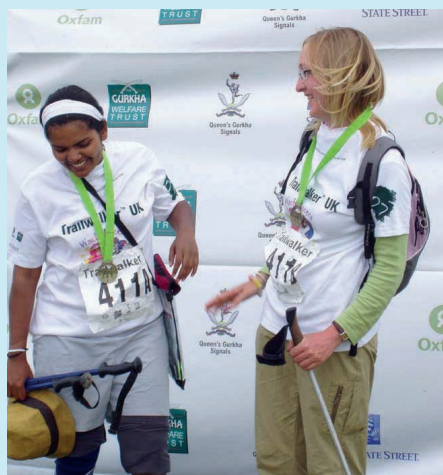
When she isn't working, sitting on the Board, or taking care of her family, Mariola's idea of fun is to spend time drawing buildings, creating prints and selling them online. She particularly likes Brutalism – a mid-century architectural style of simple block-like forms and raw concrete.

She also likes to keep fit with weights and go running.

## Mariola's claim to fame

"Mum works in the City in an interesting building that is often used for film sets. I heard through the grapevine that Colin Firth was about, so my friend and I went along. Embarrassingly, we heard the Director yelling about two girls being right in the middle of the shot of the King's speech. Yes, it was us!"

*Pictured left: Mariola completed The Gurkhas Challenge.*



## FIRE SAFETY

### House fire damages Keniston home

Last October, the residents of a Keniston house had a lucky escape when a fire started accidentally in a bedroom.

The fire stayed within the bedroom, but thick black smoke from burning foam furniture rapidly spread throughout the upper floor of the property.

Fortunately, the incident happened during the day and the family escaped unharmed. The Fire Brigade attended within a matter of minutes to put the fire out. Of course, the outcome could have been much worse, if this had happened during the night.

**To stay safe from fire, remember the following.**

- Test your smoke detectors regularly and report any failures to us immediately.
- If there is a fire in your home, make sure everyone leaves the property immediately. Do not stay and try to put it out.



*Above: The fire burnt for less than seven minutes, but the effects were still devastating.*

- Once in a safe place, call 999 for the Fire Service.
- Do not re-enter the property until the Fire Brigade confirms it is safe.

You can contact your local Fire Brigade for a free home fire safety visit. They also have a home fire safety check tool at: [www.london-fire.gov.uk/checker](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/checker), together with lots of fire safety tips.

## GAS SAFETY

### Don't let dangerous gases build up in your home

A Keniston resident who didn't know the purpose of the boiler flue terminal in their home, caused dangerous gases to build up when they enclosed it in a cupboard. The flue is designed to vent these gases outdoors.

Carbon monoxide is a gas you cannot see or smell, but it can cause headaches, dizziness, confusion, loss of consciousness and even death. Thankfully, in this case, the carbon monoxide detector picked up the danger and sounded the alarm in time.



We have also come across residents:

- warming their home using the gas oven and hob, with little ventilation
- using Calor gas heaters, and
- covering hob rings with tin foil.

All of these heighten the risk of dangerous gases.

#### Staying safe with gas

Keniston has an excellent track record for gas safety – we meet our landlord responsibilities by carrying out regular annual checks on your gas installations and by keeping them well maintained.

If your home has a gas boiler, we provide at least one carbon monoxide detector – some homes need two. We also provide a smoke detector.

Play your part by:

- giving us access for your annual gas check
- checking your smoke detectors once a month, by pressing the test button – if you find a fault, call us without delay, so that we replace it, and
- making sure you don't cover, or allow outside vegetation to grow over, your boiler flue.

## Starters and leavers



We recently said farewell to Cheryl Smith (Customer Services Officer), Paul Alderson (Rent Income Officer) and Leslie Back (Caretaker). We wish them all well for the future.

Natalie Marchant has now moved over from her Housing Officer role to take over as our new Rent Income Officer. And we warmly welcome Marvelle Dublin, who replaces Natalie as Housing Officer – job sharing with Kelsey.

From the Board, we said farewell to Shehla Hussain and Peter Voisey. We have welcomed Andrew Pert, Rachel Hewett and Mariola Viegas.

## Office update

**We are still being asked for very few face-to-face appointments.**

Having reviewed our system, we have decided to continue our policy of appointments only.

Unfortunately, we have had some threatening incidents in the office, from a minority of residents. As a result, staff will not open the door to any resident who does not have a pre-booked appointment.

We have to prioritise the safety of our staff, which is why we will not tolerate threatening or abusive behaviour.

# Keniston staff award 2024



**Thank you to all who nominated Keniston staff members for an award.**

After careful deliberation by the Resident Panel and Keniston management, we selected Resident Liaison Officer Jane Westpfel as our latest voucher winner.

The resident who put Jane forward told us: "I should like to nominate Jane Westpfel in repairs for the award. As regards the installation of new windows and doors, Jane was always updating the residents very promptly, often in the evening when events had occurred that day. Also, when on site, she would ask residents if they were OK and had any other issues. Considerate and concerned at all times."

A well-deserved award for Jane – and well done to all who were nominated.

## Help us to take action on tenancy fraud

**If someone rents out their Keniston home without our permission, gives us false information to get a tenancy, or is living somewhere else without telling us, they are committing tenancy fraud.**



Tenancy fraud is illegal, costs landlords £900m (according to the National Fraud Authority) and upsets the balance in communities.

It is vital that all the homes we rent provide homes for people who need them. Without a settled home, children's education suffers, people's health and job prospects are harmed, and it is harder to keep communities safe.

You can help us to look out for tenancy fraud by telling us if:

- people are moving in and out of one of our properties frequently
- your neighbours don't know when the rubbish is collected
- you see someone collecting rent from your neighbours, or
- you haven't seen anyone coming or going from a property in a while.

If you suspect or know that someone has been committing tenancy fraud, please report it to your Housing Officer.



**Keniston Housing Association**

13 Artington Close • Farnborough • Kent • BR6 7UL  
Phone 01689 889 700 • Website [www.kenistonha.co.uk](http://www.kenistonha.co.uk)

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