

Brockley Tenants Co-operative Ltd

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



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Your staff team at the Co-op



Jane Brenan
Finance Manager

Lenesa Browne
Administrator

Joanne Bryan
Housing Officer

Jerome Clarke
Maintenance Surveyor

Gina Betteridge
Manager

HOUSING OFFICE, 249 LEWISHAM WAY, SE4 1XF

Open 9.00 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday

Telephone: 020 8691 5898 Email: admin@brockley.coop

www.brockley-tenants-co-op.co.uk



Gina Betteridge

WELCOME TO THE AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

Dear Members and Prospective Members,

Much of this newsletter is taken up with the findings and recommendations outlined in the independent governance review which took place a little earlier this year. I realise there is a lot of information to take in, but I hope you will find it of interest. As the full report runs to 47 pages, I have not been able to include all the information in this newsletter. Please contact the Housing Office if you would like to receive a copy of the full report.

The title of the report was 'Things to fix and improve, but no serious concerns' which I believe is a fair assessment of the current position of the Co-op. I believe all organisations should be looking for ways to improve; their governance, their services, their interaction with customers, or in our case, Members. Often we need to be challenged on the way we are currently doing things in order to learn and grow. I am confident, that with the support of Members, the Management Committee and staff, the Co-op will continue to develop and thrive.

As we head towards the festive season, please do join us for our social events on Wednesday 11th December and Tuesday 17th December (more details below and on page 8).

FESTIVE COFFEE MORNING

All Members and Prospective Members are invited to a festive 'coffee morning'.

Date: Wednesday 11th December

Time: 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

Where: The Co-op's Housing Office

Please come and join us for a pre-Christmas get together. Lots of lovely refreshments will be on offer (including tea, coffee, soft drinks, cake and the all important mince pies). Please feel free to drop into the office at any time between 10.00 am and 12.00 noon even if you can only spare a few minutes from your busy schedules. We would love to see you.



INDEPENDENT GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Findings & Recommendations

Purpose of the review

The independent governance review was commissioned by Hexagon Housing Association and carried out by housing and communications consultants, Creative Bridge, to assess the Co-op's standards, style and practice of governance.

Key review questions

- How clear and fit-for-purpose is the Co-op's approach to governance?
- How fully does the Co-op comply with its rules, codes of conduct/governance, management agreement obligations and other relevant standards?
- How does the Co-op justify, reach, record and implement its decisions?
- How effectively does the Co-op respond to feedback, concerns and complaints?
- How does the Co-op need to update and improve its governance to meet modern standards?

Review findings

Prior to the review, Co-op Members, Committee Members, officers and staff all acknowledged that the Co-op's governance needed to be modernised and improved and plans were already in place relating to different aspects of this.

The review highlighted that progress and standards had been previously undermined by a number of factors which included:

- Successive staff changes
- Rules and other key documents not being fully up to date or consistently applied leading to confusion about standards and processes
- A variable application of agreed commitments and responsibilities, leading to a lack of clarity in decision making
- Concerns that some past decisions were not properly justified, evidenced or recorded, raising doubts about accountability and transparency
- Occasionally inappropriate language and behaviour by some members causing inadvertent or unconscious offence
- A failure to effectively acknowledge, respond to and close some complaints from members

GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONTINUED

The review highlighted that the findings did not present a serious risk to the Co-op but they did need fixing to secure the Co-op's future and adequate levels of service, communication and compliance. The report outlined the following recommendations to improve the Co-op's governance, its partnership with Hexagon and how the Management Committee fulfils its responsibilities and communicates its work.

Recommendations of the Review

1. Jointly note and record an unintentional breach of the Co-op's rules by letting a property at market rent to tenants who are not Co-op members
2. Revisit the draft rules prepared in 2015/16 to revise, finalise, approve and publish a comprehensive set of modern fit-for purpose rules
3. Undertake an audit and update the Co-op's key governance and policy documents, to finalise, approve and publish a comprehensive suite of consistent and fit-for-purpose versions
4. Agree the format for evaluation of the committee's collective and individual effectiveness and skills analysis
5. Arrange a structured induction for new committee members and mandatory, expert governance training for all committee members and officers based around the updated rules and documents
6. Publish agendas, minutes and non-confidential reports for all general and management committee meetings on the Co-op's website
7. Amend the layout and style of general and committee meetings to promote more open and equal contributions from all present
8. Develop and adopt a simple house style template for written committee reports
9. Pending an update of the Complaints Policy, make the Co-op Manager responsible for handling all complaints up to the final, committee stage
10. Undertake a succession planning exercise to identify and support future committee members
11. Organise a strategy event to consider the Co-op's future plans for property development, acquisition, reinvestment and investment
12. Hold an air-clearing session between Committee members and senior Hexagon staff to reset the relationship
13. Reconnect the Co-op with other local Co-ops via the Hexagon Co-op Forum and other relevant networks to benefit from ongoing learning, support and best practice
14. Consider if investing in and using specialist governance software would help modernise and secure future governance practice
15. Communicate the findings from the governance review and actions to all Co-op members through a newsletter and through the website

GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONTINUED

Final recommendation and next steps

One further recommendation was that once all the recommendations have been completed or are underway, Hexagon and the Co-op should negotiate an updated agreement to cover the Co-op's ongoing management of the Hexagon owned properties. It was noted that the new agreement should reflect all the changes recommended and include a clear, reliable mechanism for periodic review of the contract.

We have already started this process by holding a 'workshop' with a number of other Co-ops who also manage properties on behalf of Hexagon to review the management agreement and Hexagon have agreed to provide a draft version of an updated agreement for the Co-ops to review.

The work to implement all these recommendations cannot be done overnight, but over the coming months the staff team and Committee Members will be working together to address the issues which have been highlighted and provide assurance that the Co-op is carrying out its business within its rules and in ways that appropriately meet the needs and expectations of its members.

If you have any queries or would like further information about the governance review and its findings, please do not hesitate to contact the Housing Office. And I would like to reiterate that a copy of the full report can be made available on request.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY



Fascinated by figures? Bamboozled by budgets? Jane, the Co-op's Finance Manager, will be running a training session open to all Members who would like to learn how to read a set of accounts and discover more about the Co-op's finances. You do not have to have any previous experience of accounts to take part. The session will be informal and interactive.

Each session will last approximately an hour and a half. The proposed dates for the training are Monday 2nd December or Monday 9th December and you can attend either date during the day or in the evening.

If you would like to attend one of sessions please phone the Housing Office on 020 8691 5898 or email admin@brockley.coop by **Monday 25th November 2019**.

HOUSING OFFICER UPDATE



Hi everyone, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as your new Housing and Income Officer. It's been six weeks since I joined the Co-op and everyone has made me feel very welcome. I very much look forward to meeting the rest of the Co-op members. You will find me to be a friendly, approachable and enthusiastic person, hands on and very committed to the role.

Since starting with the Co-op my main focus has been targeting members who are in high rent arrears. I will offer support on income and expenditure, setting realistic financial agreements and debt management. I will be making arrangements to come and visit you with Lenesa, the Housing Administrator, for our tenancy audits but in the meantime please do call into the office to say hello and discuss any concerns you may have or need help with.

Introducing new ways to pay your rent

Due to the high costs and delays in payments from ALLPAY, we would like to encourage those members using ALLPAY to make a switch and start paying their rent via standing order directly to the Co-ops bank account. This will ensure a more prompt payment into your rent account once your transaction has been received. Paying by standing order is a convenient payment method, as once in place you can relax and not worry about your payments. The standing order can be set up to tie in with the frequency of when you receive your income. This could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly. I recommend your rent payment date is set the day after you receive your income. Please let me know if you would like to use this facility and I can arrange for you to receive a mandate form to be handed into your bank. If you use online banking, I can send you our bank details and we just need your rent account number as a reference.

We are also in the process of piloting a payment system called CARDNET. This system will allow you to pay your rent online (via a link), over the phone or in person at the office. More details on this service will follow once we have completed our end user testing. If we can stop using ALLPAY altogether the money we save can be put to better use on projects that will benefit Co-op members. We hope that by providing easier ways for members to pay their rent, we can also maximise the Co-op's income and reduce the Co-op's arrears deficit.

Money Saving Tip / Food For Thought!



Pay £2 extra per week on top of your rent = an annual saving of £104
Pay £5 extra per week on top of your rent = an annual saving of £260
Pay £10 extra per week on top of your rent = an annual saving of £520

This is a money saving idea to help keep rent accounts up to date, help in times of hardship or a change in circumstance, or free up some money for that unexpected bill. Some of our Co-op members are currently paying a small additional amount each month to allow a months' free rent in December to help towards Christmas.

REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE



Day to day maintenance

Jerome continues to offer a reactive and prompt repairs and maintenance service, visiting Members' properties on a daily basis and liaising with contractors to ensure works orders are completed within the target times. The figures outlined in the table below show we have been able to offer a fast and reliable service to Members in the majority of cases. There are times however, when delays are caused either by contractor issues or difficulties in arranging appointments.

The Co-op's contractors are not obliged to offer appointments outside of the office hours (9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday), but many are happy to try and accommodate residents who may be working or have other commitments. We ask that all Members be as flexible as possible when arranging appointments to ensure jobs are completed on time.

ORDER TYPE	TARGET RESPONSE TIME (days)	AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME (days)	PERCENTAGE COMPLETED WITHIN TARGET TIME
Emergency	1	1.2	94.8%
Urgent	3	1.7	96.1%
Routine	15	7	94.0%
Longer term	87	36	94.4%

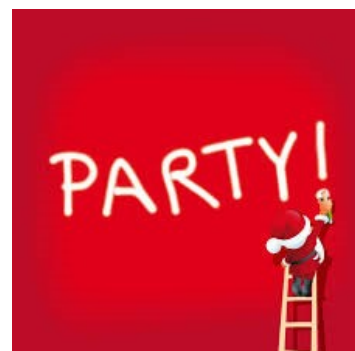
Stock condition survey and forward planning

During the past few months, Jerome has been undertaking a programme of stock condition surveys of the Brockley owned properties, to assess the need for future replacements of 'component' parts within the properties (such as kitchens, bathrooms and windows). We have also conducted a condition survey of the boilers to establish when they may need replacing. It is often more cost efficient to replace an old boiler rather than constantly replace faulty parts.

During this process, many residents told us they would like to have their windows replaced. As you are aware, many of the Co-op's properties have single glazed wooden windows which can be draughty and contribute to heat loss within the home. Replacing these windows would lead to the properties becoming more energy efficient and lowering the energy bills of Members. This is the reason we are proposing to undertake a window replacement programme next year.

THE CO-OP CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Please come and join us on **Tuesday 17th December** for the Co-op Christmas Social. The Housing Office will be open to all from 6.00 pm. A short committee meeting at 7.00 pm will be followed by festive refreshments, good cheer and music. All Members and prospective members welcome - bring the kids!



NEW YEAR MEETING TIMETABLE

Day/Date	Time	Meeting
Tuesday 28th January	7:00 p.m.	Management Committee Meeting
Tuesday 25th February	7:00 p.m.	Management Committee Meeting
Tuesday 24th March	7:00 p.m.	General Meeting
Tuesday 28th April	7:00 p.m.	Management Committee Meeting
Tuesday 26th May	7:00 p.m.	Management Committee Meeting
Tuesday 23rd June	7:00 p.m.	Management Committee Meeting
Saturday 18 July	3.00 p.m.	Annual General Meeting

GOING DIGITAL!

This newsletter has been printed and posted to you and every other Co-op Member. Going forward we would like to email, rather than post copies of the newsletter and meeting papers. This change would save the Co-op money, free up staff time and also be much better for the environment.

We understand that not everyone has access to email or an active email address. In these cases, we would continue to send out a paper copy of the newsletter and meeting information. A proposal will be put to the Membership at the General Meeting to move towards more digital communication. Ahead of this process, please do let us know if your contact details have changed or you have updated your email address.