

Say hello to your new look magazine

be.

magazine

Helping fix the housing crisis

Doing our bit to create more affordable housing options for our region

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Viv's fabulous volunteering story.

"It's great to be able to serve your own community and it makes me happy if I can help somebody else."

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Welcome to our new look tenants' magazine, Be.

2019 was an exciting journey for everyone at Staffs Housing. We invested in a project to look into how we told the story of our organisation and presented the different parts of what we do. We found that the name was valued, respected and recognised, we just needed to freshen it up and call ourselves Staffs Housing. So that's what we did in Summer last year.

Honeycomb Group is our new group name that, as well as Staffs Housing, includes home improvement agency, Revival, domestic abuse charity, Glow and homelessness charity, Concrete.

The changes we've made means we are clearer about all of the things that we do, what we stand for and the promises we make to our customers.

Thank you to all of you who got involved and helped influence our new brand. You gave us your honest feedback on our old brand and helped us test our new websites.

We've also set in stone our commitment to you in our customer promises. We promise to be real, supportive, reliable and current.

In this first edition of Be, you can see how we've been keeping our promises, and what other customers have been up to.

Looking ahead to this year, our main priorities are to increase the influence you have on our services and the things that matter, to make sure we meet our customer promises and continue to invest in quality homes.



Diane Thompson

Chief Executive

Contact us.

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Customer Services 01782 744533
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Hours 8.30 - 5.30 Monday to Friday

Let's get social.

 @staffshousing
 www.facebook.com/staffshousing
 www.youtube.com/staffshousing

We're helping solve the national housing crisis.

There's a huge shortage of affordable homes in the UK.

Research by the National Housing Federation found that the UK needs 340,000 new homes every year to meet demand and 400,000 people are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We're doing our bit to create more affordable housing options for our region. We're currently building 30 new homes and 18 new apartments in Staffordshire and are working to help combat homelessness in the area.

We're creating 18 new apartments for over 55s at the former Station Hotel in Meir. The two bed apartments will be

just across the road from Rowan Village, where new residents will be able to enjoy all the facilities, such as the coffee shop, gym and restaurant.

In Blurton, we're building 8 two bed bungalows that will be available for rent, 2 three bed homes for Donna Louise Trust, and in Longton 20 new homes on the former Florence Primary School.

We're also a proud member of 'Homes for Cathy' - a national alliance of housing associations and homeless charities dedicated to raising awareness of homelessness and helping end

it. We're working with Concrete, which is part of Honeycomb Group, to provide safe, secure, affordable homes and reduce the risk of people becoming homeless again in the future.

We also met with two of Stoke-on-Trent's new MPs to speak to them about the work we do, how important social housing is, and asked them to pledge their support to help fix the national housing crisis.

Stoke North MP, Jonathan Gullis, and Stoke Central MP, Jo Gideon, both took a tour around Staffs Housing schemes and spoke to residents and staff.

18
NEW
APARTMENTS

08
TWO BED
BUNGALOWS

2
THREE BED
HOMES
TO SUPPORT THE
DONNA LOUISE
TRUST

30
NEW
HOMES



Housing Manager, Dave Allcock, meets Stoke Central MP, Jo Gideon.



Find out more about our new homes at >

www.staffshousing.org.uk/developments



Director of Housing Services, Tim Sheail, meets with Stoke North MP, Jonathan Gullis.

LET'S FIX THE
HOUSING CRISIS
FOR GOOD.

Be. Money savvy.

TV Licensing.

Last year, the BBC announced that from June 2020 people aged over 75 will no longer get a free TV licence.

However, if you receive Pension Credits, you can still apply for a free TV licence. You'll need to show evidence of your benefit to TV Licensing.

What is Pension Credit?

Pension Credit is a benefit for people who are over state retirement age and are on a low income.

To check if you are entitled to Pension Credit contact the Money Advice Team on **01782 744 533** and we will arrange an appointment.

Did you know that up to 1.3 million pensioners in the UK are entitled to Pension Credits but not claiming it. That means 2 in 5 of those entitled to Pension Credit missing out!

Warm Home Discount.

You could get £140 off your electricity bill under the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount taken off your electricity bill, between September and March.

If you get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit

To qualify for the discount:

- Your energy supplier needs to be a part of the scheme
- Your name (or your partner's) needs to have been on the electric bill since 7 July 2019
- You must have claimed the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit (even if you get Savings Credit as well) since 7 July 2019

If you qualify, you should have received a letter at the end of 2019 telling you how to get the discount. Your letter will say if you need to call the helpline by 28 February 2020 to confirm your details.

If you have qualified, your electricity supplier will apply the discount to your bill by 31 March 2020.

If you did not get a letter, but think you qualify, contact the Warm Home Discount helpline on **0800 731 0214** available 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday.

If you're on a low income

You may be able to apply directly to your electricity supplier for help if you do not get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit.

To qualify for the discount:

- Your energy supplier needs to be part of the scheme
- You need to get certain means-tested benefits
- You'll need to stay with your supplier until your discount is paid

Your electricity supplier decides who can get the discount, so check with them as soon as possible to see if you're eligible and how to apply.

Act quick as the number of discounts suppliers can give are limited and have different closing dates for applying.

Contact our Money Team if you need more advice on 01782 744 533.

Be. Involved.

Staffs Housing tenants get snap happy.

Earlier this year we held a photography competition open to all staff and tenants. We asked budding photographers to send in their local snaps of nature and landscapes.

We had over 40 entries of fantastic photos from across our vibrant region, from Mow Cop Castle, Trentham Gardens, Westport Lake and even outside our office, here in Stoke!

Honeycomb Group Chief Executive, Diane Thompson, and West End Village Scheme manager, Gina Cooper, had the tough decision of selecting the winners: "It was so great to see so many of our tenants getting involved and take some great photos!".

The winners were celebrated at a West End Village welcome party, where the Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent presented them with their prizes and unveiled the

photography exhibition in the lobby.

Stan Huson, a West End Village resident, won the competition with his floral Trentham Gardens landscape.

He won a copy of the print, which is now hung proudly in his flat. Stan told us: "I'm just a happy snapper, so I didn't expect to win.

"My wife says I give attention to detail, but I just like to take photos of things that appeal to me. It felt really good to win and it was great to speak to the Mayor. Things like this are important to me as a Staffs Housing tenant, it shows me they really do care!"

"I'm so proud of Stoke-on-Trent. We're a warm bunch of people so its great to see our area on display."

The competition celebrated our region and brought people together to showcase their talent. Gina said: "Our tenants have some fantastic talents, so we wanted to encourage them to get involved and put them to good use!"

"We're always looking for ways to get people involved and we're so proud of the region we live in, so what a better way to showcase it."



Meet Viv.

My volunteering story.

Viv lives at Bradeley Village and has volunteered there for over 3 years.

Her first role was running the Village's bar on a Saturday night and then helping out in the bistro. Now, Viv is on the entertainment committee and is in charge of one of the most important jobs: "I book the entertainment for Saturday nights at Bradeley Village.

"We were already connected with some of the artists because they've performed here before. The others I find through an agency.

"I normally give them a call at the beginning of the week to make sure they're still ok to come. Then on Saturday I greet them, show them where to set up and then they entertain us."

As well as sourcing the artists, Viv is also part of the group which raises money to fund the shows: "There's a team of us who do the raffle and other things like guess the weight of the sweets."

We chatted to Viv while she's busy making coffee and serving customers in the Bistro: "Before starting at the bistro I'd never worked in catering before. Staffs Housing supported me though my food hygiene course.

"I normally help out once a week here, but if I see they're struggling with lots of customers I try to help out more."

Find out more about how you can get involved and the different roles available

www.staffshousing.org.uk/involved

or speak to Kerry Ball, Volunteer Coordinator on 01782 572 255.



It's really nice because you interact with the residents and it's great to be able to serve your own community. It occupies me and makes me happy if I can help somebody else.



Be. Involved.

The Stage Door is now more than just a cafe.

In July, Staffs Housing took over the Stage Door Restaurant and Coffee Shop at West End Village to provide a real community hub and improve residents' experience.

After speaking to customers and staff on ways we could improve the service, we now offer a choice of food that's mostly locally sourced and supports local businesses. You can also now pay on card, with no minimum payment.

Gina Cooper, West End Village Manager, said: "For a lot of our tenants this is a community hub that brings people together and stops people feeling isolated, it's more than just a café. We've re-thought the seating arrangements and bought new furniture to encourage more people to socialise over good food."

The Stage Door is also offering a lunch time take away service so customers can either eat it at home or save it for later.

Gina added: "So far, we've had loads of great feedback and suggestions from customers and staff. It's been great to see everyone get involved in the process. So, if you do want to see anything added to our menus or you want to make a suggestion, just let the team know and we'll do our best to make it happen."



If you've not been down to see us yet, you're missing out. It's great value for money and there's a community hub here, with loads of people that will support you. So if you feel isolated and lonely pop in. You'll always get a warm welcome.



Be. Involved.

The Stage Door at West End Village, Stoke is open to the public 9-4 Monday to Friday.

Be. Inspired.

Ideas for your Staffs Housing home.

Looking for some New Year inspiration for your home?

Why not try out some of these trends from our Saxon Gate show home.

Interested in shared ownership? You could move into our **Saxon Gate** development in **Crewe** with prices starting from £71,000 for a 40% share. Visit www.staffshousing.org.uk/saxongate for more info.

Adding new cushions, throws and accessories are a great way of updating your décor without spending a fortune. If you don't want to buy new, why not check out your local charity shop for some bargains, and help a great cause.

If you are thinking of repainting your home this year, using neutral colours, such as white and cream, and adding splashes of colour with your accessories is a great way of adding personality to your place, that can be swapped and changed as you like.



↑ Adding a playful pink splash to ultra cool grey in our show home.



Pink Cushion
£17.99
www.wilko.co.uk

Grey & Pink.

Pink isn't for everyone but we are loving this grey and pink combo!

Pink is both soft and stylish, and can really create a lovely ambience in any room.

Combining it with grey gives it more confidence and instantly relaxes the room making it much more homely.



Leaf Cushion
£5
www.asda.com



↑ Walking on the wild side in our children's room at Saxon Gate.

Tropical prints.

Tropical style is fun and fresh! It instantly injects brightness to a room, and is fast overtaking the previous floral print fashion.

Use as much tropical print as your wild side allows. We think our children's bedroom at our show home has just the right mix.



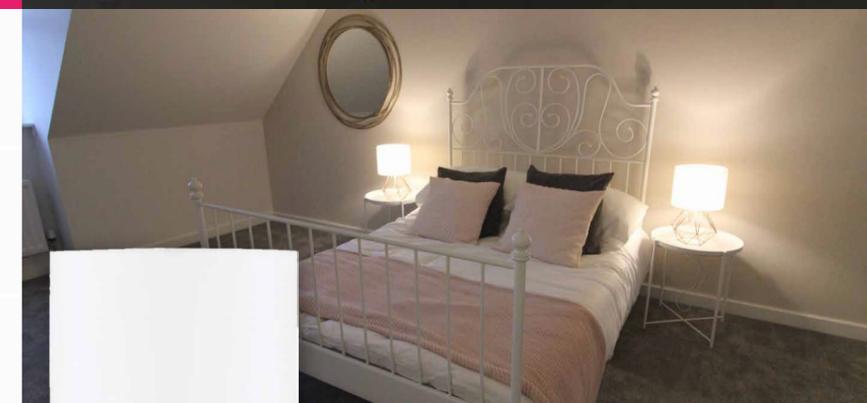
Tropical Duvet Set
£16
www.wilko.co.uk

Geo style.

You might remember geometrics from maths lessons at school, but this geo is super cool!

We've used gold geo style lamps to make the master room ultra-modern, but classy and cosy.

There are so many different types of geo styles such as circles, hexagons, squares and triangles so we're sure you can find a geo piece to fit your home too!



↑ These rose gold lamps add a modern twist to this classic bedroom.

Lamp
£15
www.iconiclights.co.uk

Mirror
£10
www.asda.com



Basket Cage Ceiling Light
£9.99
www.amazon.co.uk



Side table
£24
www.dunelm.com



Be. Introduced.



Meet the team.

Dan Kemp, Staffs Housing Gardener.

Q. What is your role here at Staffs Housing?

A. I'm one of the gardeners and my job is to keep our communal gardens looking good whatever the weather. There's 8 of us in the team all year round and as many as 12 in the summer.

Q. How did you get into gardening?

A. I wasn't very academic at school so didn't think I'd get into college. I had three course choices - engineering, decorating or gardening. I chose the gardening. After that I got an apprenticeship here at Staffs Housing before being offered a seasonal job. Two years later I got a full time role at the company. I've been here for almost 10 years now.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your job?

A. Every day is different and every site we look after is unique too. Looking after the plants is like looking after a pet, you see them grow up. Each season brings a new challenge.

One of the highlights of working here is the team. We also have a lot of new faces that join us each year as seasonal staff and I like getting to know them and swapping tips.

We have new apprentices every two years. I like teaching them and seeing them grow. They start off as young people and by the end they've become adults, and we've helped shape that journey. You can really have a positive impact on their lives.

Q. If you were in charge of Staffs Housing for the day, what would you do?

A. I'd set up an event where all the staff could shadow each other for the day and learn what each of the teams do and learn a bit more about the company.

Q. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

A. I've always done music and I enjoy rapping. You can relate to things people have been through in rap. My favourite artist is Drake. He seems like he's been through a lot and has a lot of wise words.

Q. Can you share with us a gardening top tip?

A. Don't overdo it. If you try to put too much in your garden it can become too much to maintain and overwhelming. Simplicity is key.



Meet Phil.

He's our Health and Safety Officer here at Staffs Housing and is responsible for making sure all our tenants and staff are safe.

As part of his role, he makes sure that we have all the correct policies and procedures in place to manage health and safety correctly.

Phil and his team carry out yearly assessments of the communal areas at our properties. When on site, they check that our fire prevention systems are working and look out for any hazards that could cause a fire or make it spread quicker.

"I enjoy my job as it's very varied and you come across all sorts of different things and lots of challenges.

"One minute I could be doing an inspection on a building making sure it meets fire safety regulations then I could be investigating an incident, what's happened and assessing what we can do to prevent it from happening again.

"When inspecting communal areas we look for anything that could cause a fire or make it worse. Items stored in communal areas can make a fire spread quicker, stop people escaping or make it more difficult for fire fighters to deal with.

"Often people's perception of risk and what could be dangerous is very different and explaining that to people can be a challenge.

"A lot of people don't consider fire safety unless they have been involved with one or dealt with the outcome of a fire. Sadly, simple things can cause fires and take lives."

Phil has been working in health and safety since 1996 and joined Honeycomb Group in 2014. He's a Chartered member of the Institute of Occupational Safety & Health.

Be. Safe.

Top fire safety tips...

Keeping communal areas safe.

1. Keep the area clear of any items so everyone can get out easily.
2. Always close entrance doors and internal fire doors behind you. Don't keep them open with wedges or ties.
3. Don't smoke in the communal areas.

Preventing fires in your home.

1. Only have one plug in each socket and avoid using extension leads. 10% of all fires in the UK are started by electrical problems.
2. If you smoke, make sure your cigarettes are stubbed out and thrown away carefully.
3. If you use candles, make sure they're in a fireproof holder and kept away from curtains, fabrics, pets and children.
4. Take extra care when in the kitchen. A lot of fires are started by people accidentally leaving things on the hot hob, such as tea towels.
5. Let us into your home to carry out our yearly gas checks on your heating appliances.
6. Check your fire alarms regularly and tell us if there are any problems.

We'd love to know what you think!

Let us know what you thought of our new magazine and any suggestions or story ideas for future editions. Get in touch with our Communications Team on:
communications@honeycombgroup.org.uk



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