

be

magazine

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Contact us.

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Let's get social.

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 www.facebook.com/staffshousing
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**H A P P Y
N E W Y E A R !**

2022

A very happy new year to you, your families and loved ones. I remember writing this welcome message last January and hoping that 2021 would be the year we said goodbye to COVID. Although that wish didn't come true and it has again proved to be a really difficult year for many, we still have so much to celebrate here at **Staffs Housing**.

It's amazing to see so many of you coming together to help neighbours or those in the wider community like our Stirling Close residents Gill and Margaret. It's great to celebrate your special occasions too, just like resident of 43 years Bert who turned 98 just before Christmas.

It's also fantastic to welcome our new shared ownership buyers, as well as our Lime Tree Court residents who moved in last year.

One of my favourite parts of this edition has to be the results of our garden competition. Seeing the passion you have for your gardens and communal spaces is incredible. Together we're creating spaces you're proud to call home.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Be Mag and wish you the very best for 2022.

Diane Thompson
Group Chief Executive



Thank you.

We want to thank you for your patience as we try to resolve issues with our repairs service.

A shortage of materials, challenges recruiting staff and IT issues, as well as a huge increase in the number of repairs reported has created a strain on our service. This has been on top of the usual teething problems that always happen with a new contract and especially the winter period.

All together, these issues have created a backlog

of jobs which we're working hard to resolve. Many other housing associations are in the same position but we hope to return to our usual service as soon as possible.

If you're waiting for a repair, or need to report one, here's the easiest way to do it.

The quickest way to report a repair is to email hello@staffshousing.org.uk

If you can't email and need to call us, please avoid first thing in the morning or lunchtimes. Please don't call your Housing Officer or other members of staff unless it's an emergency. If you need to speak to us

about a repair you've already reported, you can request a call back within 24 hours.

This year we're looking at new ways for you to report repairs. We're also introducing a customer panel to help us with ideas and improvements. If you'd like to know more please email us at involve@honeycombgroupp.org.uk

This November the team took 4,449 calls compared to 2,890 in November 2020





Our first coffee morning at Oliver Lodge.

We hosted our first coffee morning at Oliver Lodge in autumn last year. The housing, property services and customer involvement teams joined residents for a coffee and much needed catch up.

We're hoping to host more coffee mornings in the new year. They're an easy way for you to share your thoughts and let us know what's working and what services might need adjusting. The coffee mornings are a great chance for new residents to meet neighbours, their Housing Officer and the wider team too.

"I've really struggled throughout lockdown. I haven't been able to see my family and it was hard. As always, we've supported each other at Oliver Lodge, especially throughout the pandemic. It's lovely that Staffs Housing have hosted this coffee morning because we all get to meet up with each other, socialise and I get to meet staff I've not seen before and give my feedback."

Oliver Lodge resident



C E L E B R A T I N G

Bert's 98th birthday.

Resident Bert moved into his home in 1978.

Nearly 44 years later, he is still very happy in his Dresden home and recently celebrated his 98th birthday. Here's his incredible life story so far and his plans for 2022.

Back in 1942, at just 18 years old, Bert left his home in London to join the RAF. He was first posted to the Penarth base and later Blackpool.

In February 1943, Bert volunteered for aircrew as a Flight Engineer and after training, was promoted into the 1657 Conversion Unit Stradishall.

After returning from a placement in Africa, Bert joined World War II operations flying Stirling aircraft in many key missions including D-Day.

It was during the war that Bert met and married his wife Elsie, who was originally from Stoke-on-Trent.

After returning home from the war, Bert travelled up to the city for the very first time. His welcome meal was bacon and cheese oatcakes (of course!).

The couple lived happily in Stoke-on-Trent where they raised their five children. Elsie sadly passed away in 1991, but Bert has remained in the home they made their own for the last 43 years.

“We made the flat our own and I’m very happy here. I have great neighbours and the local community has everything I need

Whenever I need something my Housing Officer and the Staffs Housing team are there to help.”

If you recognise Bert, it’s probably because he became a local celebrity last year. Bert was a special guest at the re-opening of the Spitfire exhibition at the Potteries Museum in Stoke. His story was then featured in the local paper and a podcast was recorded detailing Bert’s incredible story.

2022 already looks like another exciting year for Bert. He is expecting a ninth great-grandchild and hopes to travel to London and Europe again.

We wish Bert a very happy new year and want to thank him for being an incredibly loyal Staffs Housing resident.



And welcoming new residents...

Our Goldenhill development is due to complete this May. We’re building 30 one, two and three bed affordable homes to rent.

These homes will be let via Stoke-on-Trent City Council. To find out more get in touch with SOTCC directly.



SHARE YOUR STORY!

We love to meet residents and celebrate your special occasions!

If you’d like to get involved contact the Communications Team using the details on the back page.



Home ownership is affordable.

Thanks to shared ownership, the barriers to owning your home are coming down. Just take a look at our Saxon Gate residents who joined the property ladder last year.

Stuart (pictured right) was a first-time buyer, tired of renting and paying towards something that wasn't his. He needed a home for his young family, somewhere they could adapt and put their stamp on. Somewhere that they could make feel like home.



"I was looking on Google one day after having a conversation with a few friends from work who had also bought a shared ownership home. They couldn't recommend it enough and told me it was a quick and easy way of getting onto the property ladder without any compromise.

I saw that Staffs Housing were selling homes on the Saxon Gate estate in Crewe, which was perfect for me and not too far from work. I'd been interested in the estate for a while so when I saw they were selling with shared ownership I jumped at the chance.

It was great because I didn't need to fork out a hefty deposit. In total it only cost me around £4,000 to move in and that's including a 5% deposit on the 50% share I purchased.

It means I'm on the housing ladder now and if I want to, I can buy more shares, called staircasing, whenever I like. My goal is to staircase over the next five years until I own 100% of the property.

I have so much more freedom compared with when I was renting and I love it. I couldn't wait to move in and Staffs Housing were amazing throughout the whole process. The communication was great and it was a really easy, positive experience."

"To someone thinking of buying a home through shared ownership with Staffs Housing I'd say do it. I wish I'd have done it sooner!"

Jamie and Lauren's story.

Jamie was also a first-time buyer looking for a home. As a single buyer he couldn't afford to buy the home he wanted using the traditional ownership route. Luckily a friend introduced him to shared ownership.

"I was looking to buy a home for me and my girlfriend to live in but I couldn't afford to live in a very nice house.

I had heard great things about shared ownership from a friend so decided to take a look at Saxon Gate in Leighton. We loved the estate and when we discovered Staffs Housing were building another phase we jumped at the chance, it was like it was meant to be!

The whole process went so smoothly, with no complaints. The house was ready for us to move straight into and we're all settled in now. It's lovely and suits us

down to the ground. It's modern, spacious and even has a big garden too!

Eventually we'll staircase to own 100% of the shares. It's a great way of getting on the property ladder."

"To anybody thinking about it, I'd say just do it!"



Only TWO homes remain at Cecilly Mills.

Our latest shared ownership development in Cheadle, Staffordshire has nearly sold out. The two remaining are both two bed Baker homes available at £92,500 for a 50% share.

Find out more at:
staffshousing.org.uk/cecillymills





Community spirit connects Stirling Close residents.

In March 2020, when the country went into lockdown, those shielding without family nearby struggled to access essentials like food and medication. Residents at Stirling Close came together to make sure this wasn't the case for their neighbours.

"In the height of the pandemic, I had to shield myself from getting the virus, as did a lot of people in the close" resident Margaret says.

"Before then I was seeing my daughter at least once a week, but when all that stopped because of the restrictions I struggled to get things like food and essentials.

"I saw my neighbour Gill and we got talking over the garden fence. I mentioned that I was worried, and

she was so lovely and understanding and said she didn't mind helping me out.

"Gill was getting food and essentials for most people in the street at one point. Whenever she went to the supermarket she'd call and make sure we were all OK. She was brilliant and I can't thank her enough."

"The pandemic has pulled everyone together", says neighbour Judith. "We've all been looking out for each other and it's nice to know that I've got someone there if ever I needed them."

This wasn't the first time residents at Stirling Close had supported each other.

"It's a real community here. Even before the pandemic, nothing was too much trouble and we would always help each other out if we could" says Margaret.

"So many of my neighbours help me. Dave builds any furniture and changes my clocks. I fell recently and couldn't get back up so I called Tony who helped me back on my feet. His wife Judith helped too!

I've been here 21 years now and I can honestly say moving here has been one of the best decisions I ever made. Staffs Housing helped my sanity the day they gave me the keys to this place.

Everyone is really proud of their home and the community we've built. We look after our homes, the neighbourhood and most importantly, each other."

"They might be Staffs Housing's properties but they're our homes."

Community fund.

We want to support our communities and make them places you're proud to call home. That's why we launched a community fund to support local projects.

Congratulations to Helping Angels Community Group who support vulnerable adults, children and their families. They were awarded £500 from our community fund for a trip to see the Blackpool illuminations.

Do you have a community project that could benefit from our £500 fund? If so, please apply by visiting:

staffshousing.org.uk/communityfund



Making your money go further.

"Energy prices are sadly continuing to rise with some of the cheapest tariffs 40% more expensive than this time last year. If you're hoping to reduce your bills this winter take a look at our tips below..."



Warm home discount scheme

You could get £140 off your electricity bill for winter 21/22. The scheme offers a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October and March. You should be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead if your supplier provides both your gas and electricity. Contact your supplier to find out more.

Winter fuel payment

Those on a low income may be able to claim a winter fuel payment, contact our Money Advice Team to see if you're eligible. If you've received it before there's no need to claim again, you should receive an automatic payment soon.

Cold weather payment

This is a £25 payment for each seven day period of very cold weather. Give the Money Advice Team a call to find out more. (You'll need to be claiming certain benefits to be eligible for this one)

Get in touch with the Money Advice Team

Text 'SUPPORT' to 07520 634032

Email hello@staffshousing.org.uk



A safer community for Karwan and his family.

Karwan, and his wife, moved into their Burslem home in 2018. They didn't feel safe in the neighbourhood they had been living in and after living with family, wanted a place of their own.

"We both really like it here. **It feels like home.** Our favourite room is the living room but the kitchen

is a great space too. There's lots of storage."

Most importantly, Karwan feels safe in his community.

"The location is great. I go to watch football and we eat out at the local Afghan restaurant just over the road.

It's a very good community and a very

good environment. I have no problems here. My neighbours are brilliant. My next door neighbour is really nice. We always talk.

It's easy to get in touch with Staffs Housing. Whenever anyone mentions they're looking for a home I always recommend Staffs Housing."

Safe at home.



West End Village residents support Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Residents took part in a focus group with the service, sharing feedback about their new safety campaign. Heather, from the Fire and Rescue Team, wanted to thank everyone who took part and felt "your input was invaluable".

The best of both worlds at Lime Tree Court.

Resident Elizabeth has her own space, surrounded by people and support after moving into our Lime Tree Court scheme.

Elizabeth moved to Lime Tree Court last year after a health condition began to affect her mobility. She needed a home with easier access and wanted to be closer to her son too.

"The selling point was having lots of people around me, but still having my own space.

I enjoy my own company so liked the idea of having the facilities and social activities over the road and not being right in the middle of everything."

Since moving in Elizabeth has enjoyed making friends with her neighbours and regularly uses the shop, hair salon and other amenities. She is also enjoying the peaceful location and having her son nearby.

"My son visits me once a week and loves it here."

"I couldn't recommend it enough. To anyone thinking of an independent living scheme, I would say do it. You get support, freedom, independence and are surrounded by people, activities and facilities, so you never feel alone."

Lime Tree Court, Meir





Meet our garden competition winners.

Winner of nicest individual garden
Brian Thompson and Housing Manager
Laura Dalton.

Congratulations to our garden competition winners who each took home a £50 gift card and a Staffs Housing gardening title.

Resident Brian was awarded Nicest Garden 2021. After moving into his Cheadle home over ten years ago, Brian has transformed his garden.

Brian says, "It's lovely to win and nice that Staffs Housing appreciate our garden as much as we do. I don't normally enter competitions but we love our garden and treat it like another room in the house. When I saw the email about the competition, I had to enter.

"We've lived here over ten years and love it. I'm always in the garden especially during the pandemic. It's helped to keep

me busy and given me something to work on. My wife and I got married recently and we decided to have our wedding reception in the garden, so it's pretty special."

Runners up Doris and David won prizes for the communal garden at their scheme in Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was a joint effort with residents across the scheme coming together to transform and enjoy the space.

"I'm thrilled to win" says Doris. "It's been a joint effort, with lots of people across the scheme chipping in to make the outside space look good. It means everyone can enjoy the space and we even get compliments from the wider community too!

"My neighbour Dave did most of the hard grafting and lifting and honestly we would have been lost without him during the last 18 months. As well as gardening he's been helping us to fetch essentials like food and medication, while having a job and finding time to see his family. We're so grateful to have him."

"It's the smallest things that make the biggest difference to people" explains Dave. "Helping out where you can and supporting each other is what community is all about. The garden has made such a massive change to people living at the scheme. With the prize money I think I'll get a nice tree and hopefully it'll help us win again next year!"



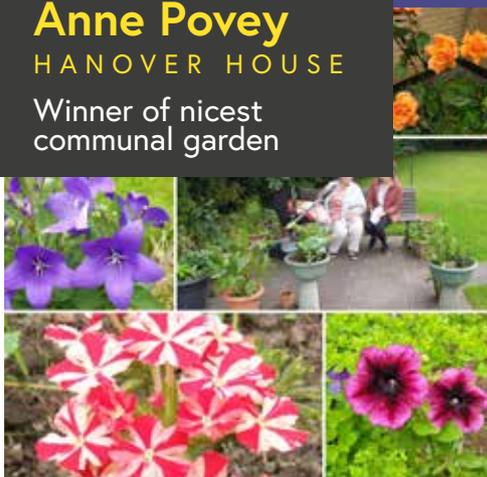
Jean Jory
BISHOP COURT

Winner of best
plant display



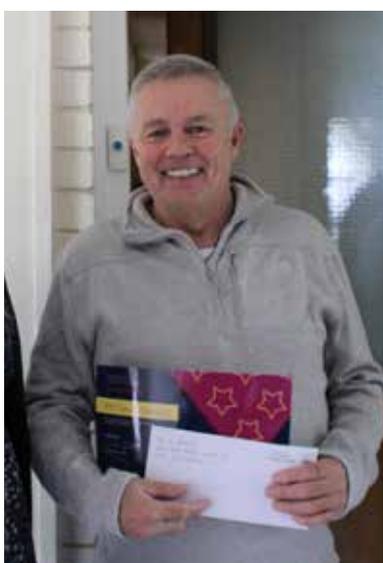
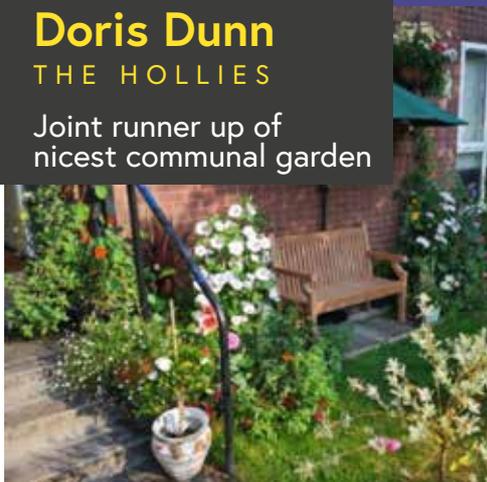
Anne Povey
HANOVER HOUSE

Winner of nicest
communal garden



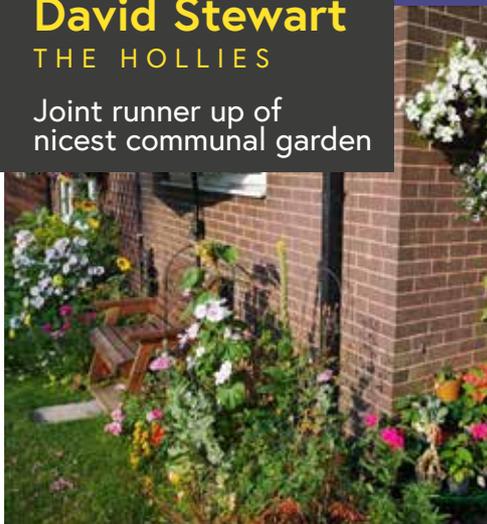
Doris Dunn
THE HOLLIES

Joint runner up of
nicest communal garden



David Stewart
THE HOLLIES

Joint runner up of
nicest communal garden



Stay warm and save money this winter.

- 1** Turn your heating down by 1°C.
- 2** Use your central heating timer to turn heating on and off and not the thermostat.
- 3** Keep your radiators and the space around them clear. Things like sofas can absorb the heat.
- 4** Use thermal or heavy curtains during the winter and close them at dusk. This will help stop heat escaping through the windows.
- 5** Use letter box covers to help minimise the draught.



LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

Let us know what you thought about our magazine and if you have any suggestions or story ideas for future editions. Get in touch with our Communications Team on:

communications@honeycombgroup.org.uk

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