

BETRA News

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Renewal of tenancies



Today, all new residents moving on to estates like ours are issued with fixed term tenancies (usually five years) instead of the so-called secure tenancies that were issued used prior to 2013.

When these five-year tenancies are due to expire, we get in touch with tenants to discuss their situation. This will usually be around nine months before your tenancy is due to expire.

BETRA will visit your home to discuss your circumstances. If your circumstances have not changed significantly, and you have been paying your rent and behaving appropriately, there should be no problem renewing your tenancy.

However, if you have not been fulfilling your responsibilities, or are in rent arrears, then this is an opportunity to discuss ways in which you can 'get your house in order' so as to avoid eviction.

Finally, tenants need to be aware that households with an annual income in excess of £36,000 might not have their tenancies renewed.

Lobbies and landings

Some residents are continuing to use the landings and lobby areas for storage. This is not allowed as it constitutes a fire and safety hazard.

Havering has a zero-tolerance policy on this. Buggies, shopping trolleys, even doormats are not allowed in the hallways and landings.

As managing agency for the estate, BETRA is required to clear and dispose of such clutter if residents refuse to move it.

We want to be as considerate as possible - for example with wheelchair users and parents of toddlers who do not live on the ground floor - but in general, we will be enforcing Havering's policy, with monthly checks of all the blocks. So please, if this affects you, de-clutter today!



This photo shows clutter blocking access to the intake room, which means if there was a flood or an electrical fault affecting the building we wouldn't be able to quickly shut off the water/electricity supply

Storage sheds

Some residents on ground floors benefit from access to sheds. If you have keys for a shed but do not use it, please let us know, so that people on higher floors with buggies etc can take advantage of these storage areas.

Estate to get extra funding



Havering's Community Engagement Team brought their road show to BETRA earlier this month, to talk with residents about a new fund that could benefit the estate.

The issues that arose included parking, lighting, decoration of the blocks, and upgrading of the bin areas. Havering as a whole could benefit to the tune of £10m from this new source of funding, and we are optimistic that a good proportion of this will be used to improve our estate.

Watch this space for more details as we get them.



Back to work

As you know, we were off for a while in August - we can only apologise.

A series of unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances meant we were unable to work. Inevitably, the estate took a dip in the way it looked and its general cleanliness. Our partners at the Havering Estates team helped us out and did what they could, so we would like to thank them for their efforts.

However, we're back now, and hopefully getting the estate back to where we would like it. If you think there is anything we can do, or suggestions on how to improve the estate generally, please, as always, feel free to contact us by any means and we will do what we can.

Can you believe summer has come and gone so fast? Now we're into autumn, which means winter, and more importantly Christmas, is just around the corner! Make sure you check out the grants available from the Government to help with heating (opposite page). They may apply to you.

Regarding Christmas, keep an eye on the notice boards as we hope to arrange and as this is our last newsletter of the year, please take note of the office opening hours during the festive period on page 4.

Community Warden Service

Havering is proposing changes to its Community Warden Service, giving it a wider remit and greater powers.

You will have received a letter about this recently. The new service will cover the whole borough, not just its estates. Tenants and leaseholders will continue to contribute towards it through their service charge. There will be no increase in this contribution.

The changes are likely to mean fewer patrols in our area, about which there may be differing views. On the upside, it may result in a more comprehensive and – when necessary – targeted service.

Havering are keen to hear your views on these proposed changes

The consultation period has included a number of public meetings in recent weeks, the last of which will be at Hornchurch Library, 44 North Street, Hornchurch, on Tuesday 22 October 13.00 – 19.00.

Alternatively, you can submit your views online at:
consultation.havering.gov.uk/housing/proposed-changes-to-the-community-warden-service

Your contact details



Residents change their mobile phones quite frequently these days and sometimes fail to notify us of their new number.

In case of emergencies, BETRA needs to keep up-to-date contact details for all our households, so please keep us 'in the loop'. This information will be confidential and used only by our staff when it is important that we contact you.



Jenny's world

We've had a busy time in the BETRA office recently, catching up with work we were unable to do during our recent unexpected layoff, as well as just getting through the day to day tasks and challenges.

These tasks can be divided into three categories:

- Repair issues, including concerns about damp and mould problems.
- Advice and assistance on ways to search for and get into paid and voluntary jobs.
- A lending ear for various problems the tenant may have.

That last one covers a wide range of issues. It's a privilege to be entrusted with people confidential issues, and while Lloyd and I may not be able to help every time, we can often signpost people towards the help they need.

So if you have problems and don't know which way to turn, you can always come and see us. After all, it's what we're here for.

Ready for winter?



Winter is round the corner, so it's time to prepare for the big freeze.

Problems with your boiler?

If so, let us know sooner rather than later - as Christmas approaches, these problems become more frequent, which means the Council's plumbing service is stretched and delays more likely.

Blocked sinks?

Same again, let us know sooner rather than later if you have a problem. As winter draws on, sink blockages become more frequent, which means the Council's service is stretched and delays more likely.

Lobby lights

At the end of October the clocks go back, so the lobbies get darker sooner. Let us know if the communal lights in your block are not working, or if they need adjusting.

Problems with damp and mould

Havering offers to do a survey of properties affected by damp and mould. To register for this, you need to go online and complete a short questionnaire. Havering officials will then decide if action is needed. Go to havering.gov.uk and search 'Problems with damp and mould'.

Havering offers the following advice:

Dampness, condensation and mould growth in the home is a common problem, especially in older buildings. It can cause mould on walls and furniture and lead to rot in timber window frames and floors. It can encourage the growth of house dust mites and increase the risk of respiratory illness.

Causes of damp

Dampness can be caused by:

- Condensation. This is the most common cause of damp homes.
- Penetrating damp. This is when rainwater gets in due to leaks in pipes, roofs, walls and windows.
- Rising damp. This is when moisture enters from the ground through the walls and floor.

If you have penetrating or rising damp, you may need help from the Council.

If the dampness is not caused by penetrating or rising damp, then it is most probably due to condensation.

Condensation

Follow these three steps to help prevent condensation in your home:

- Produce less moisture (for example do not dry clothes on radiators, do not leave kettles boiling).
- Ventilate your home (for example keep your windows slightly open, close kitchen and bathroom doors when they are in use).
- Insulate, draught proof and heat your home (for example insulate your loft, draft proof around external doors and windows).
- Have your house at a constant temp rather than high temperatures for short periods.

Mould

To kill and remove mould you should:

- Wipe down walls and window frames with either a weak bleach solution or a fungicidal wash, which is available from most DIY shops.
- Dry-clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.
- Avoid disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning as it can make existing respiratory problems worse.

After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint. This helps prevent mould re-occurring.

Help with heating

There are three schemes residents should know about.

Winter Fuel Payment

A Winter Fuel payment is a one-off, tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 made during the winter to help with heating costs, it is made to households with someone over Pension Credit age.

Most people born on or before 5 April 1954 will usually qualify for a payment in 2019/20. For details on how to apply go to www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment

Cold Weather Payment

You may get a Cold Weather Payment if you're getting certain benefits or Support for Mortgage Interest. Cold Weather Payments are different to Winter Fuel Payments.

You'll get a payment if the average temperature in your area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees celsius or below for 7 consecutive days. You'll get £25 for each 7 day period of very cold weather between 1 November and 31 March.

This year's scheme is due to start on 1 November 2019. Check if your area is due a payment in November 2019. For more details, visit www.gov.uk/coldweather-payment/what-youll-get

Warm home discount scheme

You might be eligible for a saving of up to £140 off your electricity bill for winter 2019-2020 under this scheme.

The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between September and March. You may be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead if your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity. Contact your supplier to find out. The discount will not affect your Cold Weather Payment or Winter Fuel Payment.

Eligibility: There are two ways to qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme:

- You get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit - known as the 'core group'.
- You're on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for the scheme - known as the 'broader group'.

How you apply for the Warm Home Discount Scheme depends on how you qualify for the discount. For more details, including how to apply, go to www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

Alternatively, for help in applying for any of the above, drop into the BETRA office where Lloyd or Jenny can advise you.

Safer Neighbourhood Team

Police officers from the Safer Neighbourhood Team will continue to hold contact sessions in the BETRA office over the next few months

Residents are free to come along and discuss any issues of concern they may have. Or you may have information that you want to pass on to them, or simply wish to know what the local Police are doing in the area. All discussions will be in strictest confidence.

The sessions will be on:

- 28 October 10am - 11am
- 12 November 11 - 12
- 27 November 10 - 11
- 17 December 11 - 12
- 02 January 10 - 11
- 21 January 10 - 11

Trash tenants

Please can all residents dispose of their rubbish properly - bagged and in the bins provided.

Some tenants think it's ok to throw rubbish from their balconies on to the paths below. **It is not.**

Members of the BETRA maintenance team have more than enough to do without cleaning up after you. Residents who persist with this anti-social behaviour risk eviction.



Christmas arrangements



The BETRA office will be open on Monday 23 December from 8 till 12 midday.

Closed 24 December to 26 December.

Friday 27 December - telephone service from 9 - 5

Monday 30 December - telephone Service from 9 - 5

Closed 31 December and 1 January

2 January - Full service resumes .

Rubbish collection

We will work with Havering regarding rubbish collections over the period and inform every resident of their Christmas and New Year schedule using our notice boards in your lobbies and around the estate as soon as we have them to publish.

Please bear in mind all the above while throwing out your Christmas rubbish and boxes over the festive holidays.

BETRA



The last Wednesday of each month, in the boardroom, from 5-7pm

Meet friends and neighbours for an easy-going chat over a few games of bingo, followed by an end of game buffet on the house. All residents welcome.

BETRA AGM

Due to take place in September, this had to be cancelled due to illness. We hope to go ahead with it in November, though a date is yet to be decided. Watch the notice boards for details.

BETRA

Wendy Thomas, Chair
Lloyd Edwards, Estate Manager
Jennie Goddard, Housing Officer
Mark Richardson, Senior Caretaking and Repairs Maintenance Officer
Steven Richardson, Caretaking and Repairs Maintenance Officer
Brian Pratt, Caretaking and Grounds Maintenance Officer

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