

# CITIZENS news

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

## KIMBOLTON ROAD

Looking after our assets and  
providing affordable housing

## RENT REVIEW 2024

What you need to know



Bedford Citizens  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION



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Bedford Citizens HOUSING ASSOCIATION

# WELCOME



Welcome to our latest edition of Citizens News. As we head into Spring we have lots to update you on, both about what's happening here at BCHA and about some of the changes to how we are regulated as a landlord.


In this edition of Citizens News we hear the latest from our very own resident author, Marilyn Freeman about her new book 'Field to Furnace'.

Our health and wellbeing focus is around mental health and support with managing this and we've included some advice and tips from the NHS 'Every Mind Matters' resources.

Listening to our residents and tenants is very important to us at BCHA and in this issue we'll talk to you about some of the feedback from our resident survey and some of the things we are working to improve.

**Marie Taylor** Chief Executive





# GOVERNANCE UPDATE

# THE NEW REGULATORY

# FRAMEWORK

As a housing association, we are a regulated organisation and the regulation is changing from April this year.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023 and officially became law. The Act aims to improve the regulation of social housing, strengthening tenants' rights, and ensuring better quality and safer homes for residents.

Everyone has the right to a warm, dry, safe, secure, and affordable home, the Social Housing Act aims to give tenants greater power and enable the Regulator of Social Housing to better support tenants living in unsafe homes.

From April 2024, there will be four new consumer standards that will set the requirements that we must meet:

**The Safety and Quality Standard** - requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.

**The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** - requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision-making and hold their landlord to account.

**The Neighbourhood and Community Standard** - requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.

**The Tenancy Standard** - sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

# GOVERNANCE UPDATE

# HOUSING OMBUDSMAN – NEW COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE

The Housing Ombudsman is introducing a new Complaint Handling Code that will come into force from 1 April 2024. This means that, as your landlord, we will be obliged to follow the new requirements. The Code aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling and in doing so, to provide a better service to residents.

The Housing Ombudsman will be producing information for residents including an expectations document for you to understand what you should be seeing from your landlord on complaint handling.

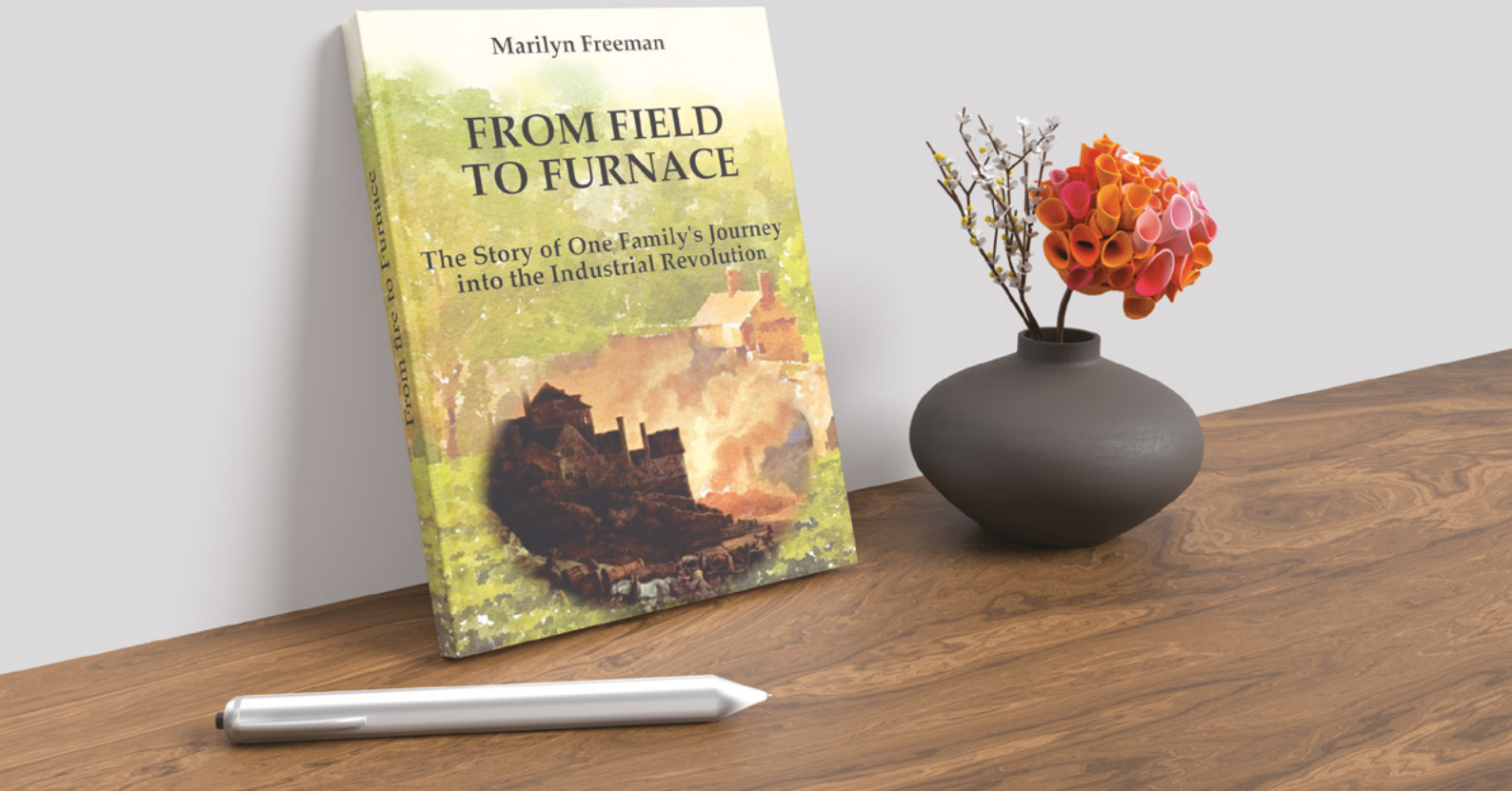
The new Code does not impact your ability to bring your complaint to the Ombudsman and does not impact any complaints that are currently being investigated or have been lodged.

The Housing Ombudsman has resources and information about making a complaint that you can access online:

[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/  
residents/make-a-complaint/how-to-  
complain-to-your-landlord/](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/how-to-complain-to-your-landlord/)

If you don't have access to these resources online or would like any help talking to us about our services and how we can improve, please contact us on **01234 321400**





# WRITERS' *corner*



BCHA resident, Marilyn Freeman's latest novel.

BCHA's resident author, Marilyn Freeman takes readers on a captivating journey through the heart of 18th-century Shropshire with her latest historical novel, "Field to Furnace."

Set against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution, the novel navigates the profound changes that swept through the lives of the Bangham family, capturing the essence of an era marked by radical transformation. "Field to Furnace" is a departure from Marilyn's earlier work of family mystery and suspense novels. Rich in historical detail, the novel draws inspiration from the author's

own ancestors, weaving a narrative that explores the profound impact of seemingly inconsequential decisions with sometimes tragic consequences.

The book delves into the complexities of human relationships, navigating the twists and turns of familial ties. With a passion for storytelling, Marilyn takes her readers on a journey through time and emotion, where the threads of family, mystery, and suspense are expertly woven into a captivating tapestry.

"Field to Furnace" is now available to pre-order in bookstores and online retailers.

# VALUE FOR *money*

A Penny  
for your  
thoughts

Value for money is really important at BCHA. It underpins the delivery of our vision and objectives. For us, it's about making the right choice between cost and quality to deliver the best services to our residents that we can.

If we can optimise value for money throughout the organisation, we can free up resources to invest in services for our residents and maintain your homes to the highest standards possible.

Some of the areas we have been focussing on this financial year include:

- Investing in technology to drive efficiency and customer service improvements
- Supply chain and procurement
- Environment and energy efficiency

If you've got any ideas about value for money, we'd love to hear from you, so talk to a member of the team or contact us on 01234 321400



# ALL ABOUT *gardens*

R G N I R E T A W S S E L C  
 E V E G E T A B L E S T A A  
 D F E R T I L I S E R S W E  
 E R A G A R D E N E S I N N  
 E R S G E S U O H N E E R G  
 F S D E T R E E S E F G R N  
 D E S U B G N I D E E W I G  
 R E N I H S N U S H R U B S  
 I V E G E T A T I O N T E S  
 B D S R E W O L F D I G T L  
 E O E F E P L A N T S H E R  
 R H O R T I C U L T U R E T  
 P R U N I N G T E R U T A N  
 R W I L D L I F E S D E E S

- |            |              |             |
|------------|--------------|-------------|
| Trees      | Greenhouse   | Shrubs      |
| Lawn       | Plants       | Nature      |
| Composting | Flowers      | Bird feeder |
| Weeding    | Horticulture | Wildlife    |
| Seeds      | Pruning      | Vegetables  |
| Garden     | Sunshine     | Fertiliser  |
| Vegetation | Watering     | Dig         |

## TENANT MEETINGS

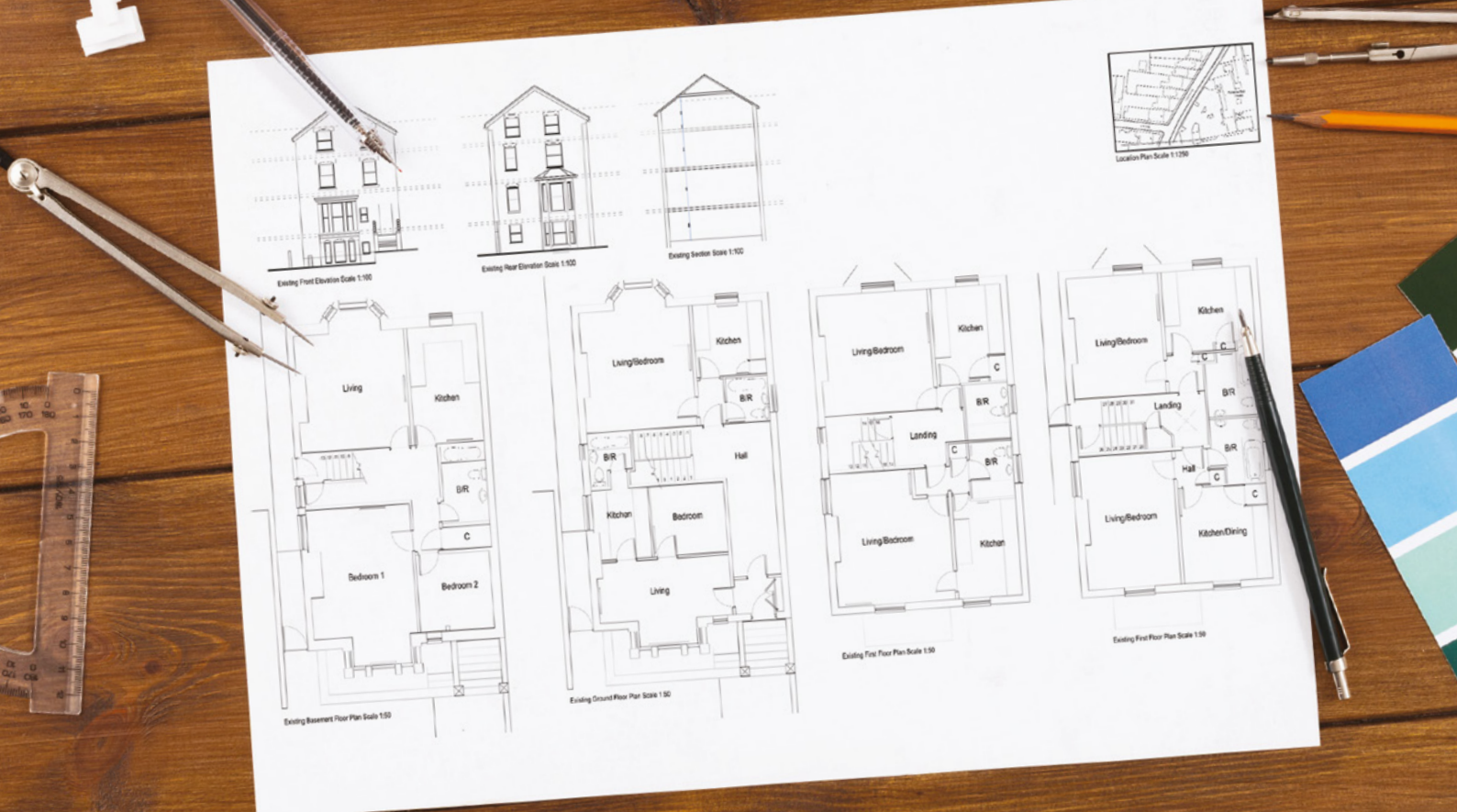
We continue to offer quarterly tenants meetings in our schemes and you can find out more about these on the notice boards and in your scheme newsletter

In the meantime, if you're interested in finding out a bit more about tenant involvement opportunities here at BCHA, please contact Lisa Brennan on **01234 321400**



## RELATIVES MEETINGS

We continue to offer both in person and virtual relatives meetings in Charter House, to find out more about these please contact us on **01234 321400**



# KIMBOLTON ROAD

## LOOKING AFTER OUR ASSETS AND PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In this article we take a look at a recent planned maintenance project at one of BCHA's properties in Kimbolton Road.

This property was one of the first purchased by BCHA to meet the organisations goal to provide homes for older people in Bedford.

After the current roof being in situ for over 120 years, the roof on the property required replacement. The original roof was built using traditional construction methods of the time and over a century later, modern methods of construction and building regulations have moved on considerably.

To meet this challenge the roof replacement had to:

- Comply with current building regulations.
- Meet new energy standards, including additional insulation which would improve the thermal efficiency for our tenants.
- Meet with the planning requirements including the property being in a conservation area.
- To design and include the installation of a fire break.

In addition to these challenges the new roof would weigh more than the previous





roof and have an elevated profile. This meant additional supports would be needed to ensure the structural integrity of the building.

When undertaking any project, value for money is a key consideration for BCHA. To ensure this, we went through a robust tender process to ensure that we had the right contractor with the skills and expertise to deliver the project.

In addition to the roof replacement, we also looked at opportunities with the block to improve our housing stock. As part of the project, we were able to reconfigure some of the flats from studio flats to one bedroom flats. These are more popular with customers.

Overall, the project has been a great success and it's important to us to keep improving and maintaining the homes that we provide for our tenants.

Of course, all of this work cannot happen without the help and support of our tenants. We would like to thank all of our tenants at Kimbolton Road for their support during the project.



## TENANT SURVEY

# *your feedback*



Your views matter and hearing from you about the things that we do well and those things we could do even better is really important to us at BCHA.

To help us with this, we run tenant satisfaction surveys so you can tell us how things are for you and share your ideas about how we can improve services.

We are in the process of reviewing your latest feedback and developing a customer service improvement plan.

We will talk to you about the results of the survey and the action plan in our next edition of Citizens News.

As part of the new consumer regulation, that we talked about in the governance update, we are including 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' in our regular surveys. These are measures that

have been set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

To help improve services and comply with regulation, we will collect and provide information to support effective scrutiny of our performance in how we are managing your homes and neighbourhoods.

When we have collected this information we will share with you how we are performing against the tenant satisfaction measures and what we are doing to improve services. We will also include information about how we have met the regulator's requirements around satisfaction measures.

# THISTLE

## CONTENTS INSURANCE



Have you got your home insurance in place? If not, why not have a look at the My Home Insurance Scheme.

The My Home Contents Insurance Scheme is a specialist insurance scheme provided by Thistle Tenant Risks, The policy covers the contents and personal belongings for tenants in social housing against loss or damage from specific events (for example, fire, theft or escape of water).

The My Home Scheme can cover most of your household goods and contents whilst in your home, such as furniture, TV, clothing, carpets, electrical items and general household goods. It does not cover property used or held for business or professional purposes. Full details of the policy cover and exclusions are available on request before you apply for cover.

The insurance also covers replacement of external locks if your keys are lost or stolen and the contents of your fridge and freezer (excludes damage caused if the electricity supplier deliberately cuts of the supply to your home).

There are also additional cover options which you can add to the standard policy.

### CONTACT DETAILS

#### General enquiries

Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm

0345 450 7288

myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk

#### Postal address

Thistle Tenant Risks, Thistle Insurance Services Limited, Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 1UB



# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The NHS has a resource called 'Every Mind Matters' and in this article we've put together some of the advice and tips that they offer with a focus on worrying.

There are little things we can all do to lift our mood or ease our anxiety - we are all different and so we need to find what works for us.

This could be as simple as taking a walk, getting some time outside and getting some fresh air, prioritising our sleep or opening up to a friend. Our little thing, if we keep doing it, will make a big difference to how we feel.

Worrying - In this article we have a look at some tips for tackling your worries.

Worrying is part of life. We cannot eliminate it completely or control everything, but if your worries feel overwhelming there are lots of things you can try to manage or overcome them, including the **"worry time"** technique.

## WRITE THEM DOWN

Sometimes, just getting things out of your head and down onto paper or a notes app on your phone can help you clear your mind and make it easier to work through concerns one by one.

## SET ASIDE 'WORRY TIME'

If you find that your worries are taking over your day, it can help to try to manage this by setting yourself some "worry time" - a short period, say 10 or 15 minutes, every day or so before bed to write things down and try to find solutions. Making this a regular thing can help put your mind at ease and stop your thoughts racing when you're trying to sleep.





## **DO NOT DWELL DURING THE DAY**

Once we have a regular worry time, this can help prevent us from getting lost in our worries during the rest of the day.

So, when a worry does enter your mind, think “I’ll set that aside for my worry time.” This can help you shift your focus back to the here and now.

It might feel difficult at first to stop your thoughts from returning to the worry, but as time goes on and you settle into the habit of having worry time, it should get easier.

## **ACCEPT THE WORRIES YOU CANNOT CONTROL AND MOVE ON**

Worrying is part of life. We cannot eliminate it completely or control everything. For any worries you have identified as ones you cannot do anything about, try to acknowledge and accept this.

Often, even just knowing we’ve spent time thinking about a worry properly and assessing the options can help dampen them.

Try not to dwell on one worry for too long – either move on to dealing with another, or find ways to shift your focus, distract yourself, relax or clear your mind.

## **FOCUS ON THE PRESENT**

In time, following these steps should make it easier to deal with the worries we can do something about and stop the ones we cannot from becoming overwhelming.

But, if anxiety is creeping in, it’s really useful to have some go-to strategies – like exercise, yoga, or breathing, mindfulness or meditation techniques – to help calm us down and bring us back to the present moment.

These can take time and practice to get used to, but they really can help you feel more in control of your thoughts and feelings.

## RENT

# REVIEW 2024

In March, we will be writing to you about the annual rent review. This applies to our Housing stock and does not apply to Care Fees & Bedford Charter House.

This year the rent increase will be 7.7%. This is driven by the record inflation levels that we continue to experience.

Our rents are set using a government formula and service charges are purely set to achieve cost recovery.

We will be sending you a rent review letter which will give you some more

information about the rent increase. If you would like to discuss your individual circumstances, please contact us on 01234 321400

The rent increases will take effect from 1 May 2024.

For residents of Charter House, residential care fees will increase from 1 April 2024.





INTRODUCING

# OUR NEW CHIEF

Charles Stafford has joined us here at BCHA from the British army where he had served for thirteen years.



Charles has spent his military career working in a wide range of places, environments and challenging conditions around the world. He has

been based in Afghanistan, The Falklands and Canada to name a few.

Charles has lots of experience of managing a large team to feed thousands

of people in one sitting. His claim to fame is that he has also cooked for royalty!

Charles has been busy reviewing the catering services and talking to some of you about this and is looking forward to meeting lots more of our residents over the coming months.

We'll talk to you in the next edition of Citizens News about some of the new menus and ideas that Charles is developing as a result of your feedback.



A copy of Citizens News in large font or different languages can be requested.

📍 1B Kimbolton Road, Bedford MK40 2PU

☎ 01234 321400

✉ enquiries@bchal.org

[www.bchal.org](http://www.bchal.org)

