Autumn 2026

CITIZENS news



Health & Wellbeing

Staying healthy this Autumn

Autumn preparedness

Handy guide to home safety

Bedford Citizens HOUSING ASSOCIATION

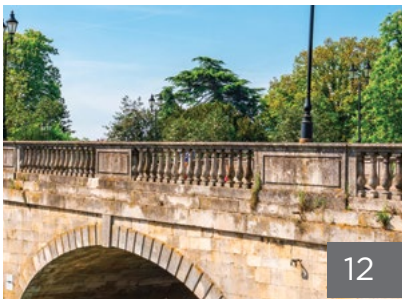
IN THIS ISSUE: RESIDENT STORIES • FINANCIAL & PRACTICAL SUPPORT











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WELCOME

Welcome to the Autumn 2026 edition



Marie Taylor
Chief Executive

As the leaves begin to turn and the evenings draw in, Autumn brings a familiar sense of reflection and preparation across our homes. It's a season of coming together, connection and community - and this year it's also a time of continued innovation and growth at BCHA.

Over the past few months, our teams have been working hard to strengthen wellbeing programmes, expand activity offerings and enhance safety measures ahead of winter.

This edition of Citizens News is packed with updates, stories, guidance and celebrations from across our homes. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed putting it together.

Marie Taylor
Chief Executive

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

HEALTH & WELLBEING FOCUS

Staying healthy this Autumn



Autumn brings cooler temperatures, shorter days and seasonal illnesses. Here are some simple tips to help you and your families stay well through the coming months.

Hydration & nutrition

Even in cooler weather, hydration remains essential, so try to make sure you:

- have regular drinks throughout the day
- try hot drinks and maybe something different such as herbal teas
- hydrating foods like soups, stews and fruit

Our team will be introducing new autumn dishes, including casseroles, apple crumble and warming porridge options.

Mobility & exercise

Maintaining mobility is key to wellbeing. This season we're focusing on:

- gentle stretching sessions
- chair based exercise
- supported walks
- balance and coordination activities

Emotional wellbeing

Autumn can be a reflective time and sometimes difficult for people with darker evenings and mornings. Talk to our teams about what activities you can join in with:

- gentle exercise
- music therapy
- craft sessions

Seasonal vaccinations and staying well

We encourage you or your families to speak to us about:

- flu vaccinations
- COVID boosters
- any changes in health or mobility

Keeping up to date with vaccinations will help you to stay well during the winter months and we can help with arranging these for you.

Resident **STORIES**

We love celebrating the people who make our homes so special. This autumn, we're sharing Barry's story - From the business world to the garden shed.



Many of you will know Barry Freeman, but perhaps not everyone knows about the remarkable project that has occupied much of his time over the past 25 years.

Born in Kempston, Bedford, in 1940, Barry enjoyed a long career in business before deciding to devote himself to his lifelong passion, writing stories for children.

Over the years he has created a delightful cast of memorable characters whose adventures combine gentle humour, touching moments and important life lessons about kindness, courage, friendship and accepting our differences.

His much-loved **Rusty Nail and Friends stories** are set in an ordinary garden shed, where everyday tools and objects spring to life.

Led by Rusty Nail and her friends, the stories introduce young listeners to a world of imagination where even the smallest character has an important part to play.

Together, Barry and his wife Marilyn have recently brought these stories to a wider audience by launching the Rusty Nail and Friends podcast.

Barry narrates each story himself, giving the characters warmth and personality, while Marilyn looks after the publishing, editing and promotion behind the scenes.

The podcast is accompanied by a series of books, allowing children to enjoy the stories in both audio and print. Listeners from around the world are discovering the stories from the shed and its unusual inhabitants.

It's great to see that retirement and life at Bedford Citizens has provided the opportunity for Barry to fulfil a lifelong dream, proving that it is never too late to begin a new adventure, or to inspire the next generation through the power of storytelling.



SAFETY & PREPAREDNESS: Autumn–Winter 2026

Health and safety remains our top priority. As we prepare for winter, here's how we're keeping residents safe — and how families can support.



FIRE SAFETY

Our fire safety procedures include:

- Regular alarm testing
- Staff fire marshal training
- Clear evacuation routes
- Safe use of heaters and electrical items

You and your family can help by ensuring any personal electrical items brought into your home or Bedford Charter House are in good working order.

Fire doors save lives – please help us keep everyone safe.

Fire doors play a vital role in protecting residents and buildings. They are designed to slow the spread of fire and smoke, helping to keep communal corridors, stairways and escape routes safe.

To work effectively, fire doors must be kept closed and in good condition. We are therefore reminding all residents to:

- Keep fire doors closed when they are not in use.
- Never wedge or prop open a fire door.
- Do not remove, alter or interfere with a fire door or its self-closing device.
- Make sure visitors also follow these precautions.
- Report any damage, fault or problem with a fire door to BCHA immediately.
- Contact BCHA before altering a flat entrance door or replacing its locks, letterbox or other fittings.

Please report a fire door that does not close fully into its frame, has a damaged closer, frame, glazing or seals, or has unusually large gaps around it. You should also tell us if a communal fire door is regularly being wedged open.

Tenants must not replace or alter their flat entrance door without BCHA's prior written permission. Even a small alteration can affect the door's ability to prevent fire and smoke from spreading.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

We also conduct routine checks on:

- Sockets
- Appliances
- Lighting
- Portable heaters

HEATING SAFETY

As temperatures drop, our maintenance teams ensure:

- Radiators are functioning correctly
- Thermostats are set to safe levels
- Rooms remain warm and comfortable
- Damp, mould & condensation are monitored
- We continue to follow best practice guidance to prevent damp and mould

As we head into the colder months, keeping an eye out for damp and mould issues is a priority.

We want all our residents to have warm, safe and dry homes. By understanding some of the causes of damp, we can work with you to help prevent these occurring in your home. Here, we look at causes of damp, what you can do to keep your home condensation free and how you can contact us if you need help and advice.



There are four main causes of damp in the home and these are:

1. CONDENSATION – this comes from moisture produced by everyday activities and can be made worse by not having enough ventilation and also by cooler temperatures

2. RISING DAMP – this is unusual because a damp proof course prevents this issue, but if you are worried you have rising damp, it can usually be seen by a tide mark above the skirting board.

3. PENETRATING DAMP – this is usually caused by a problem with the fabric of the building which means rainwater is able to get through the walls, roof, windows or doors.

4. PLUMBING FAULTS OR BROKEN OR LEAKING PIPES – rising damp and penetrating damp can usually be easily identified at the early stages.
A leaking pipe can be more difficult to identify and, if you suspect you may have a leaking pipe then this should be reported to **BCHA** on **01234 321 400** as soon as possible.



KEEPING YOUR HOME
condensation free

WINDOWS -
Open windows frequently to allow air to circulate around your home, particularly after a shower or bath or when cooking. Wipe moisture from windows and sills when it appears.

BATHROOM -
When using the bath or shower, open the window and put the extractor fan on. Wipe down baths, showers and tiles after use. Use a mould and mildew remover spray (not bleach or soapy water) if you see black mould on the walls, ceiling, tiles or grout.

KITCHEN -
Keep the windows open and extractor fans on when cooking. Use lids on pans to reduce the amount of steam released into your home.

VENTILATION -
Always use extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms and keep vents open.

HEATING -
If your home is too cold, condensation is likely to occur and you may also be increasing your risk of health problems. Try to keep your home between 18-21°C.

FURNITURE -
Leave a gap between your furniture and the wall and try to position large furniture on internal walls where you can. Don't pile things up against walls or overfill cupboards - allow air to circulate as much as possible.

DRYING CLOTHES
- Dry your clothes outside if and when you can. Avoid covering up radiators with clothes. This increases moisture levels and reduces the air temperature as the radiators are warming the clothes, not the room.

You can find out more information on our website and if you are worried about damp and mould in your home, please contact us on **01234 321400.**

FINANCIAL & PRACTICAL SUPPORT
For residents & families

As winter approaches, families often ask about financial support. Here's what's available in 2026.

ENERGY SUPPORT SCHEMES

Residents may be eligible for:

- Energy bill support
- Warm Home Discount
- Local council energy grants through Bedford Borough Council

COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

Families can access:

- Council Tax support
- Pension credit guidance
- Local hardship funds

BENEFITS ADVICE

Our team can help you and your families navigate:

- Attendance Allowance
- Carer's Allowance
- Disability benefits

HOW WE CAN HELP

We offer:

- Signposting
- Support with forms
- Guidance on eligibility
- Practical advice

SPOTLIGHT ON PENSION CREDIT -
Checking your eligibility for Pension Credit

Pension Credit is a benefit that tops up your weekly income if it's below £238 (for single people) or £363.25 (for couples).

Many people are unaware that they are eligible for Pension Credit, which also provides access to other benefits, such as a free TV licence (if you're over 75), help with housing costs, and even increased Winter Fuel Payments.

To check your eligibility, you can:

- Visit the government's Pension Credit calculator online.
- Call the Pension Credit helpline on **0800 731 0469** for assistance.

If you are eligible, Pension Credit could provide you with valuable extra income and additional benefits.

LISTENING TO OUR CUSTOMERS & learning how we can improve



During the fourth year of TSM (Tenant Satisfaction Measures) data collection, we have been able to compare our performance year-on-year as well as benchmark how we are performing compared with other social landlords.

We are also pleased to see satisfaction with your homes has increased along with satisfaction that homes are safe.

Over the last year, several satisfaction measures have seen scores reduce, the results highlight key areas for improvement, particularly in relation to repairs performance, complaints handling, and communal area maintenance.

There has been a reduction in overall satisfaction, satisfaction with repairs, and satisfaction with the time taken to complete the most recent repair.

RESPONDING TO YOUR FEEDBACK & PRIORITIES

We've reviewed your feedback and the survey results and have identified the following key actions for the coming year:

- Review and strengthen repairs contractor performance through a revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) with clearer expectations, monitoring arrangements, and a focus on completing repairs within target timescales.
- Improve communication through the launch of a Tenants Portal and the introduction of WhatsApp as an easy way to contact us.
- Consult with you about Bedford Citizens taking on responsibility for internal communal cleaning and the introduction of a service charge.

We will keep you updated on our progress with the action plans.



AUTUMN ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

- Remembrance activities
- Gentle movement morning
- Winter wellbeing

DECEMBER

- Festive crafts
- Mince pie taste tests
- Charter House Christmas party



DID YOU KNOW?
Fascinating facts from Bedford's Past

We are just one of many local organisations with a long history in Bedford. In this edition, we're taking a look at some of Bedford's history you might not know about!

Bedford may feel like a modern town today, but its history stretches back more than 1,000 years.

The town grew around a crossing point on the River Great Ouse, with its name thought to mean "Beda's Ford" after a Saxon leader and the river crossing used by early settlers. The river has shaped Bedford's story ever since.

One of Bedford's most dramatic historical events took place in 1224 when Bedford Castle came under siege by King Henry III. The battle lasted around eight weeks and involved thousands of soldiers. After the castle finally surrendered, the king ordered much of it to be destroyed. Today, Castle Mound is one of the few remaining reminders of this medieval fortress.

Bedford was also an important market town during the Middle Ages, attracting traders and visitors from across the region. Markets have been held here for centuries and continue to be a key part of town life.

Another famous connection is with John Bunyan, author of The Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan lived and preached in Bedford during the 17th century and his legacy can still be explored at the John Bunyan Museum.

Next time you think about Bedford, remember that living here, you're following in the footsteps of centuries of local history.

Autumn **WORDSEARCH**

Y J H B O N F I R E Z U C A P G C I
D H C Y A G G I L H R V Q U P A H Y
N O A Z R P N F R O S T G F R A I B
S P R X F N D F Z E Z S H P V G V L
Y E H L L H N P O A W W S U N K Y A
H P R A O K A V Q T H O D M V M S C
T S Q M L R L T R G B R R P A H O K
S E R A H L D L A F C E D K A V C B
E M U S H R O O M S K G K I S X E E
V G K V A L O W C Q W D C N X T L R
R K J U V U W W E J L E C R I S P R
A T U T N K Z C S E U H A E B Z P Y
H M J B K R Q C R L N A R T K O A L
F V I F U O B L E A V E S A E F S X
U E C S O J Y G K D X I X S I R L C
O E B G T L M R N H W J N S C N X R
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O B E Q S G Q J V E E S Z X Q U R U

LEAVES
BONFIRE
CONKERS
HARVEST
ACORNS
PUMPKIN
WOODLAND
CRISP
MIST
RAIN
SWEATER
COSY
MUSHROOMS
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APPLE
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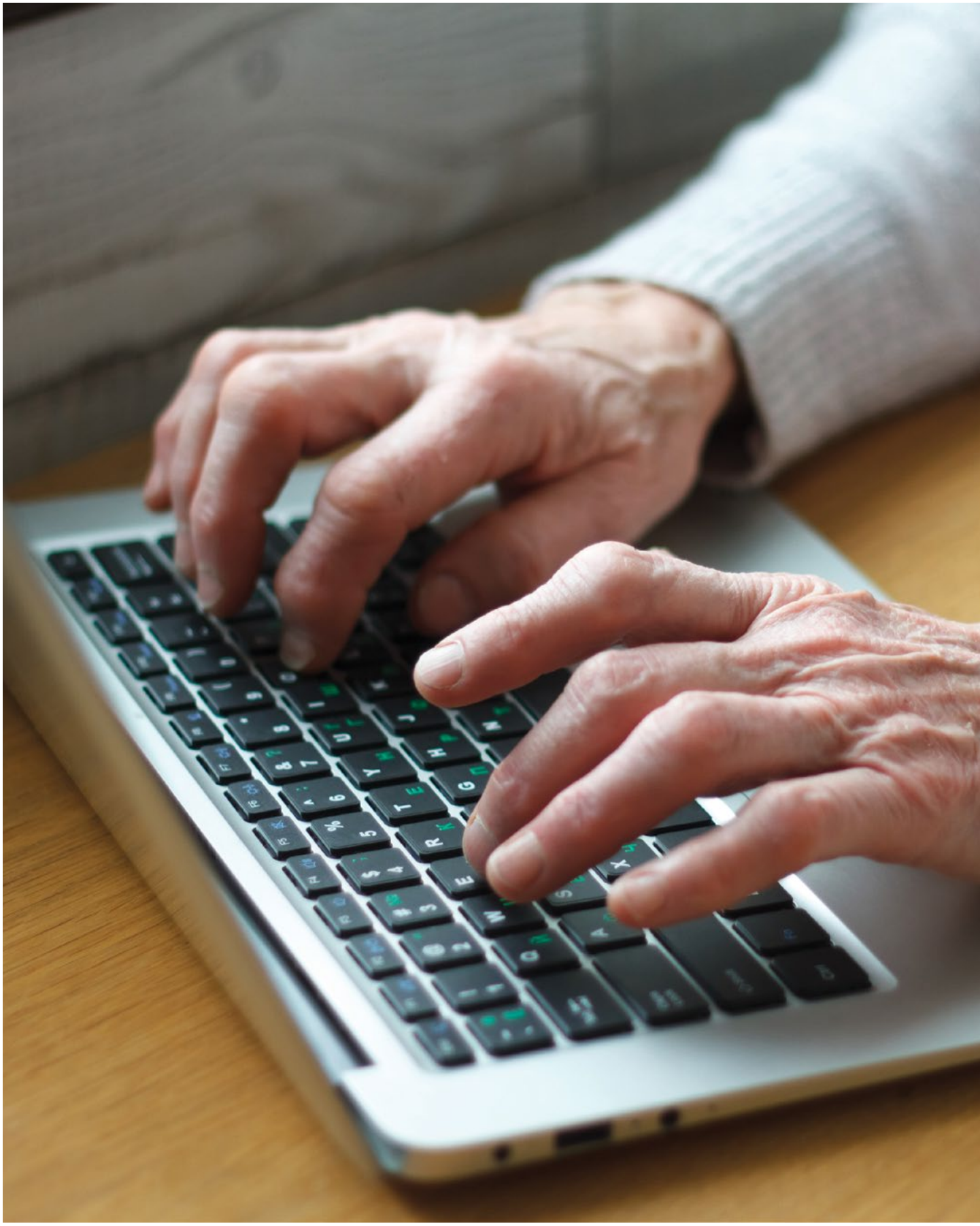
FIREWORKS
HALLOWEEN
FOLIAGE
FROST



STAIRS: helping you find out more about BCHA

Knowing how your landlord makes decisions, spends money and looks after your home helps you understand the services you receive and hold us to account.

The Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements, known as STAIRs, are designed to make this information easier for social housing tenants to access.

What information can I find?

Our STAIRs publication scheme, which began on 1 October 2026, brings together information about BCHA in seven areas:

1. How we are run and make decisions.
2. Our finances and spending.
3. How we maintain and improve our homes.
4. Our performance, including tenant satisfaction and complaints.
5. The housing services we provide.
6. Relevant lists and registers.
7. Our housing policies and strategies.

This includes information we already publish, such as our annual report, Tenant Satisfaction Measures and complaints report.

Visit **www.bchal.org** to find out more. If you cannot find what you need, please contact us.

What if I don't use the internet?

Please contact us for help finding and understanding the information. You can ask us for paper copies, large print, translations or another accessible format. Our team can also help you find and understand the information.

What if information is missing?

If you believe information should be published, or you disagree with a publication decision, you can ask BCHA for a STAIRs review. Tell us which information or decision concerns you. You can also nominate someone to act on your behalf.

We will normally respond within 30 calendar days. If we need longer, we will explain why and tell you when to expect a response.

This is separate from our usual service complaints procedure. If you remain dissatisfied after the review, or do not receive a response, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman, which is free and independent.

What changes in April?

From 1st April 2027, our social housing tenants or their nominated representatives will also be able to make written requests for information about how BCHA manages its social housing. We will share further guidance before this begins.

STAIRs covers tenants in our general needs homes, Maydenbury House, Bedesman House and Oak Way House.

Need help or have a question?

Call **01234 321400**, email **enquiries@bchal.org,** or speak to a member of our team.



1B Kimbolton Road, Bedford, MK40 2PU
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BCHA