



Black Country Housing Group

Resident Broadcast - Special Edition August 2022

Welcome to this special edition of the Resident Broadcast, we have some important feedback and updates, included for you:

- The 2022 Garden Competition winners of each category
- Feedback from first ever Customer Conference, and your opportunity to have your say
- Changes to law and regulation that have an impact on the way we manage your homes
- Help available with the cost of living

Blooming Lovely

The Resident Scrutiny Voice Panel (RSVP), in partnership with BCHG Homeforce hosted the 2022 Garden Competition. We received 51 entries and the standards were higher than ever before.

A special thank you to our Resident Scrutiny Voice Panel (RSVP) who formed the judging panel and chose the winners. The results speak for themselves!

Winners received voucher prizes, and the best communal garden a plaque that is mounted on the wall. Congratulations to all, and we hope you will enter again next Summer 2023.

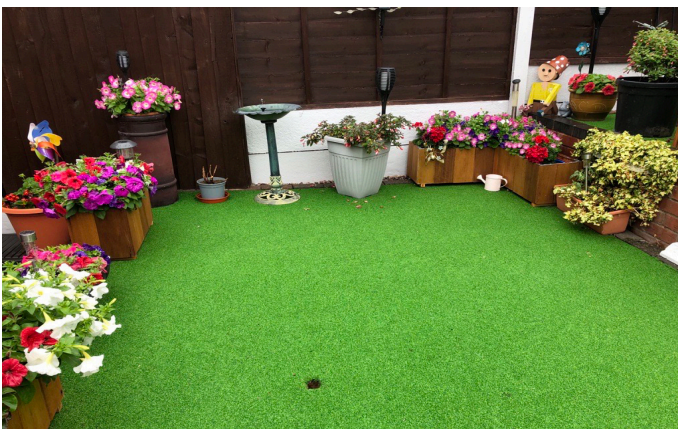


2022 Best Garden Contest Winner

This garden used recycled material, diverse plants and gave a feel of a tropical garden.

2022 Best Communal Garden

A communal garden that has brought neighbours together and its upkeep has helped their mental and physical wellbeing.



2022 Best Flowerpot / Basket

Recycled material and a great array of flowers and pots.



Customer Conference 2022

Together with Tenants, Transparency and Trust



Customer Conference 2022

Thank you to those who attended our Customer Conference on 28th July 2022, and to everyone who sent comments by email.

The conference took place at The Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, and the purpose was simply to listen to our customers' feedback, which would inform our Strategic Plan for the next three years. This is part of the BCHG approach that says, 'no voice, no approval'.

What took place?

The day kicked off with a video featuring Kai Jackson, and Archie Gibson from RSVP. It was overlaid with poetry, using the talent of Jeremy Grant from BCHG Social Business Team, about the importance of customer voice. You can watch the video here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whtBMLHK_OM

Adrian Eggington, Deputy Chief Executive, stepped in for the speaker who unable to get to the event because of the train strike. Adrian gave an overview of the changes within the housing sector, and further detail is provided later.





Residents were split into three groups, and using a speed dating method, spent time discussing three themes:

1. Homes and Environment
2. Customer Service Culture
3. Neighbourhoods and Communities



What customers told us:

- Change in how we badge our services (non-stigmatised)
- Focus on trust and transparency
- Enhance the Customer Relation Manager model with even more empathy from all of BCHG and consistency
- Rely less on sub-contractors but need for focus from BCHG Homeforce on delivery and more time in homes
- More community-based focus with BCHG playing an increased role – clear input into more partnership working with Councils, police, Fire Service etc
- Continued support for Retirement Living model
- Improve energy efficiency of existing homes



What happens next?

We know that not everyone could come to the conference, so we would like you to have your say too. We are organising two online discussion groups on Zoom:

- One discussion will focus on the important issue of Climate Change and how we can work together to tackle this in our homes and neighbourhoods. There are 12 places available.
- The second discussion will focus on the big issue around the cost of living, increasing inflation and the impact of this on rents and services. There are also 12 places available. You can read more information on cost saving below.

If you're interested in attending, please click this link: <https://forms.office.com/r/xcaCRmyUZ> and place your expression of interest and your preferred time. We will go through a selection process, to get a wide representation of areas. We will contact you to let you know if you have been selected. Please register your interest by 20th September.

Please note that all of the feedback will be presented to Members of the Board of Management who will use this to shape the next strategic plan. We will provide a further update on this in future Broadcasts. We hope next year to open the conference and have an event that involves staff and customers working together to make improvements, we will provide more detail nearer the time.

Housing Legislation

Adrian Eggington, Deputy Chief Executive

There are an above average number of legislative changes impacting on the Housing Sector either being enacted or proposed. The key changes you may wish to be aware of include:

- The new Social Housing Regulation Bill which significantly increases the powers of the Regulator for Social Housing in relation to the how Housing Associations are performing and aims to increase transparency in all that we do. For more detail, please search for Social Housing Regulation Bill on your preferred search engine:

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3177>

- The Government has announced an intention to extend the Right to Buy further for Housing Association tenants but at this stage detail is very limited. It is likely to be capped to a set number per year.
- The Building Safety Act was passed in April 2022 with a new building safety regulator and new rules on materials in new and existing high rise buildings.
- The Renters Reform White Paper strengthens the rights of tenants in the private rented sector and removes "no fault" evictions. All fixed term tenancies irrespective of landlord will be abolished and all notice periods will be increased to two months minimum.

BCHG has assessed the impact of all of this legislation and at this stage has no significant concerns while continually being a learning organisation, preparing to adapt to any necessary changes.



Cost of Living

Hints and tips to save money

Everyone is feeling the pinch at the moment, whether it be the huge increase in utility bills or the cost of food sky rocketing or the astronomical cost of a litre of fuel. To help you manage the increase in the cost of living we have pulled together some hints and tips on some of the small things you can do to save here and there.

Utility Bills

Unfortunately there is no magic wand here – it is just about the small things you can do.

- Heat the person not the home. If you are at home wrap up in layers rather than putting the heating on. Use a water bottle. Have a blanket or a throw around to use. Invest in a heated throw, these will keep you warm and are a cheaper option to putting the central heating on.

- Batch Cooking – if you are using the oven make sure you fill it rather than cooking one thing at a time, make a batch of something and cook while you have the oven on then freeze it for another day. If you can, use a slow cooker for things rather than the oven, it will be on for longer but costs less to run.

- Only use the water you need in a kettle, or boil a full kettle and then fill a flask.

- Try swapping your baths for a shower. If you already shower try to take a shorter shower.

- Water firms hand out free water-saving gadgets via water efficiency site Save Water Save Money. These include shower heads, tap inserts and garden hose nozzles. As well as saving money for those on water meters, as much of the water we use is heated, it reduces energy bills too. Check it out at www.savewater.savemoney.co.uk

- LEAP is a free service that is helping people keep warm and reduce energy bills without costing them any money. Check out their website www.applyforleap.org.uk



Food

- Avoid throwing food away. Do you know the difference between Use By and Best Before dates? Best Buy is just the manufacturer's view on when it's no longer at optimum quality – you can still eat that product.

- Too Good To Go – this is an app that you can download for free and lists supermarkets, restaurants & coffee shops that have excess food at the end of their day that they want to sell at a really reduced rate. You pay through the app and go to the store to collect. Some of the bargains we have seen on here include boxes of fruit & veg from Morrison's that are easily worth £15 on sale for £3.09. Check out their website www.toogoodto.go.co.uk

- Olio – this is a free app and is used for people to share items free of charge. This includes food as well as other items such as clothing and household goods. The food on here may just be from someone local that is having a clear out or may be from one of the Olio Food Waste Hero's, these people collect food from supermarkets at the end of the day. You can go on and see who is giving away food in your area. You can often pick up bread, fruit & veg and chilled items from the Food Waste Hero's totally free of charge, you just request the item then make arrangements to collect.

- Shop around, if you have never tried Lidl or Aldi give them a try, you will be surprised how much cheaper they are than the traditional supermarkets. Lidl has come top in a Which cheapest supermarket survey. A basket of 21 everyday items came in at £26.83 in Lidl (Aldi was £27.14) but some of the other bigger supermarkets came in up to £9 more expensive.

- The Downshift Challenge is essentially dropping down a brand level on groceries – for example, 'finest' to 'branded' to 'own brand' to 'basic'. If you can't taste a difference, stick with the lower level. On average it cuts 30% off bills, so if you only stick with half, that's 15% saved. It's not just food either – you can do it with toiletries and cleaning products.



Financial Help

- Get money back if you pay council tax - You can get £150 back from the council to help pay your energy bills. You'll get the rebate if you pay council tax and your home is in council tax bands A to D. You can find your band on your council tax bill. If you pay your council tax by direct debit your council should pay you automatically. Local councils will start to make the payments directly into bank accounts in April 2022. If you don't pay by direct debit or didn't set up a direct debit before the end of March 2022, you should still get a rebate, look out for information from your local council on how to claim this rebate.

- Family income under £30,000 (or £50,000 in rare cases)? Check whether you are entitled to any benefits. Even if you only qualify for a small amount it can open the door to other support such as council tax reduction or reduced utility tariffs. Have a look at the benefit checker on the Gov UK website www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators

- Water companies offer financial assistance to people on lower incomes and certain benefits. This can be a substantial reduction in your water bill for up 2 years. Have a look at your suppliers website for further details (for South Staffs Water this is called the Water Assure Tariff).

- Citizens Advice Bureau offer lots of advice on their website around grants and benefits to help people pay their energy bills, take a look at www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/get-help-paying-your-bills/grants-and-benefits-to-help-you-pay-your-energy-bills/



Where can I find further help?

GOV UK publications:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-living-support/cost-of-living-support-factsheet-26-may-2022>

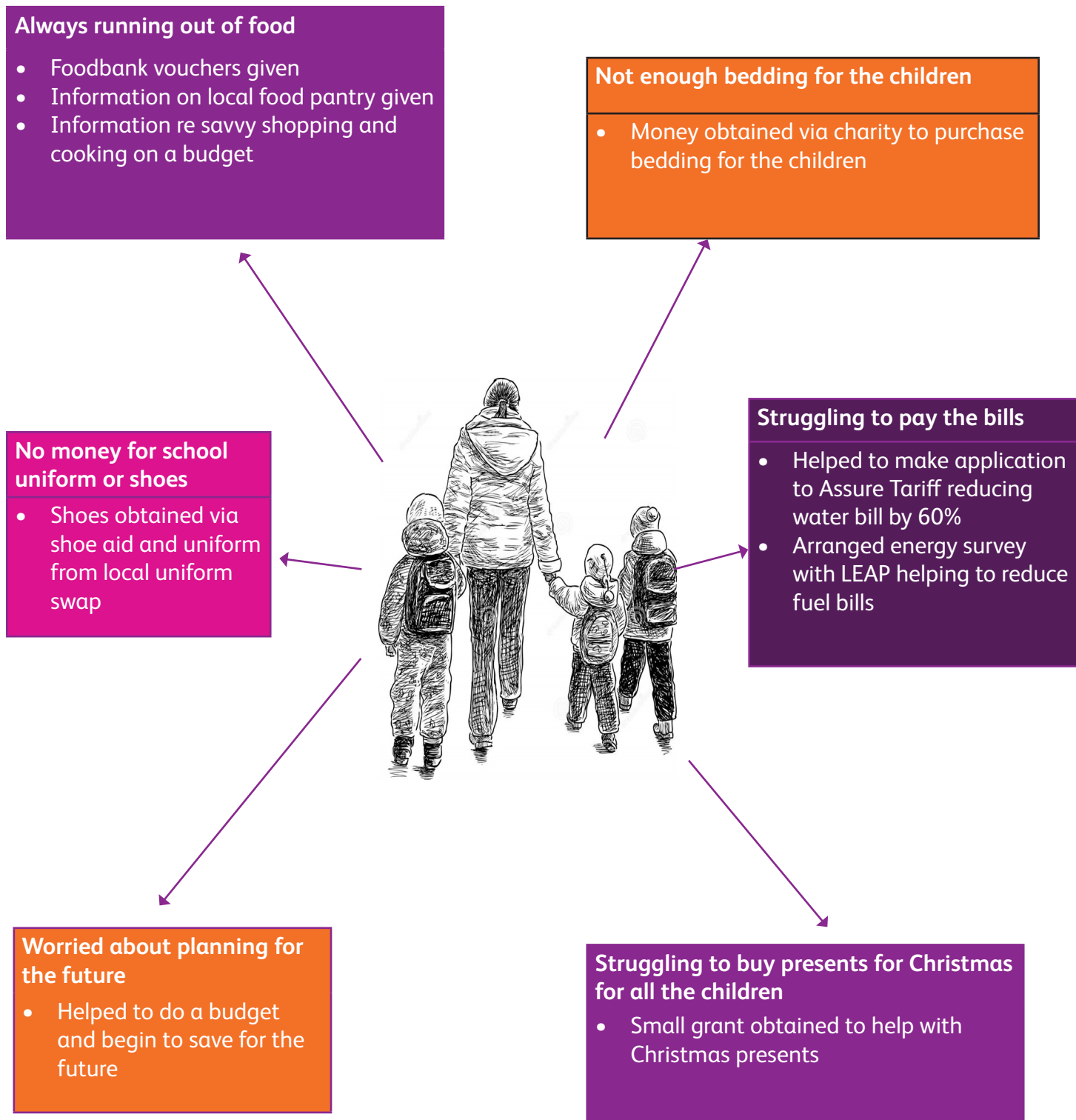
BCHG's Social Business Team support - our in-house team can offer help with budgeting, claiming benefits, getting on-line and looking for work or other support you need to make a success of your tenancy. If you need help then please contact your CRM in the first instance to arrange a referral to the team.

The visual case study below is an example of how our Social Business Team supported one family with their budgeting and cost saving.

Visual Case Study - Mrs M

We were asked by a local food bank to visit Mrs M who had recently visited them to obtain a food parcel. Mrs M and her partner had taken on young children following tragic circumstances and in addition to having extra mouths to feed she had also lost half of her household income as she was unable to continue to work so was solely trying to manage on her partners income.

A discussion with Mrs M revealed the family situation. The sudden and unexpected change of circumstances had hit them hard and there were several issues which we hoped to help with.





How to contact us

 Follow us on Facebook - Black Country Housing Group

 @blackcountryhousinggroup

 @BCHousingGroup

 0121 561 1969

 Arrange a home visit

