Having your say

Customer service in the spotlight

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Welcome to @Metropolitan

It’s been another busy year here at Metropolitan, but we’re already looking forward to what 2017 has in store.

As you may already know, a key priority for us over the coming years is to focus on improving customer service. We had a really useful discussion about this at our Customer Summit in London this September. As a result we’re looking at all of your suggestions and putting together a plan of action for delivering the improvements. You can read more about this on page 4.

We’ll also be launching a new-look website (page 8), plus we’ll continue to provide our customers with lots more opportunities to improve their skills and employability. We’re also continuing to work on several exciting new housing developments in locations across the country. Take a look at page 6 for a sneak preview.

This edition we’re also including handy tips for you on how to save energy (page 8), our top 10 interview tips (page 11) and how to save money over the festive period (page 13). I hope you find them useful.

Finally, I’d like to wish our customers all the very best for the festive season. Our contact centre will be open for emergency repairs 24/7, so if you need to get in touch, remember to call us on 020 3535 3535.

Jenny Danson
Executive Director of Housing Services

Would you credit it?

Earlier this year we teamed up with leading credit reference agency Experian to help customers who rent one of our homes to improve their credit history, thereby making it easier to access financial products and services and get the best deals on anything from mobile phone contracts to gas and electricity bills.

The Rental Exchange scheme helps people build an online proof of identity which companies rely on when they make decisions about lending. So, for example, if you want to benefit from the best insurance deals on a comparison website, you need two online proofs of identity and by taking part in the Rental Exchange, your rent account counts as one of these.

Early indications are very positive, with figures from Experian showing that the percentage of our tenants who now have those essential two proofs of identity has gone up from 65% to 94%. Not only that, but over 40% of tenants would improve their credit scores and 10% would be able to secure access to credit and services that they wouldn’t have been able to previously.

The Rental Exchange is an opt-out scheme and around 5% of tenants chose not to take part. Given the improvements that we are now seeing, if you did opt out but now might like to opt back in, please do get in touch by calling us on 020 3535 3535 or email contactus@metropolitan.org.uk.

Tenancy fraud crackdown

This year we’ve been running a pilot scheme in London to crack down on tenancy fraud – something that costs the taxpayer an estimated £900 million each year and prevents people who genuinely need social housing from getting it.

There are different types of tenancy fraud, but the most common ones we’ve come across include unlawful subletting and right-to-buy fraud.

Through careful investigation and evidence collection, so far we’ve recovered seven properties without the need for court action, which can be costly and time-consuming. This equates to a saving of over £200,000 of costs to us and the public purse. We’re also continuing to investigate 13 further cases.

If you suspect that a property is being occupied illegally, please contact us on 020 3535 3535 or suspected.fraud@metropolitan.org.uk in confidence.

Visit us online at: www.metropolitan.org.uk
Customer service in the spotlight at annual summit

Around 40 delegates attended our second customer summit, which took place in London in September. The annual summit is a great opportunity for customers to put their questions to chief executive Brian Johnson, see what’s been happening over the last year and give input into what we should be tackling as a priority in the coming year. This year was no exception, and generated lots of lively discussion and debate.

Much of the discussion centred around customer service. We know we need to make significant improvements and recognise that the standard we deliver to customers isn’t always as it should be. Suggestions included everything from offering anonymity when reporting ASB and changing the contact centre on-hold music, to providing more information on services and offering incentives for completing surveys. We’ll keep you posted on progress as we work through other suggestions in the next issue of @Metropolitan. In the meantime, if you’d like to get more involved, we’d love to hear from you – please call us on 020 3535 3535 or email contactus@metropolitan.org.uk.

Responding to your feedback
We asked Jenny Danson, Executive Director of Housing, to respond to some of the points raised by customers at the summit.

Q Does giving feedback really make a difference?
A It really does! For example, we’ve recently reviewed the surveys that we ask customers to complete when they’ve had a repair done. In the past we’ve focussed on the repair itself but now we’ve widened that to cover the whole process from start to finish. By introducing these ‘start-to-finish’ service surveys we’ll have a far more thorough overview of the process and be able to make tweaks as necessary.

Q What are your plans for improving your phone system?
A I’m really pleased to tell you that we’re about to launch an improved system, which will help us get you through to the right person the first time. The new system is more intuitive and will recognise callers if they use the same number to ring in. It also includes a queuing feature so when you call up you’ll know where you are in the queue and what the average waiting time is. During peak call times, if you aren’t able to wait, you might then decide to contact us via another channel, such as email or the website.

Q Why can we only call or email the contact centre?
A There are other ways of getting in touch with us. For example, you can raise and track a repair or pay your rent online via Customer Self Serve. Now we’re looking at improving the way we manage our social media channels so that when you contact us via Facebook and Twitter you’ll get a much quicker response to your query.

Filling the void
When a tenant in the East Midlands moves out of their home, it’s down to Metworks, our in-house repairs team, to test the electrics, carry out any repairs and clean the property so that a new customer can move in as quickly as possible.

Since taking over this service in the East Midlands in May, by November Metworks had already turned around 355 empty properties.

The Metworks teams have also started to organise coffee mornings in areas where they’ll be undertaking modernisation works. This is proving to be a popular way for customers to find out about the works planned in their area and to ask any questions they may have in a friendly and informal environment.

The Metworks team isn’t only responsible for making sure empty homes are in a good condition before a new tenant moves in, they also carry out all repairs and planned maintenance across the East Midlands. Customers in the region tell us that they are happy with the level of service the team provides, with satisfaction rates running consistently at 99%, which is a great achievement.

We’re planning to roll out our in-house repairs service in London in the future. You can keep up to date with our plans for our repairs service on our website at www.metropolitan.org.uk.
A new community in a new town

We’re working with Chase New Homes to create around 500 new homes at our Times Square development in Welwyn Garden City.

Around 60 of the apartments will become available to buy in March 2017, with the rest being completed over the next three to four years. The site, which was originally used for commercial purposes but was vacated in 2015, will contain a mixture of apartments for both shared ownership and outright sale. There is demand for this type of property for those looking to buy their first home in Welwyn Garden City, where local housing predominantly consists of three or four bedroom houses.

Flying high in Huntingdon

With a history dating back to the 12th Century, Brampton Park near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire is about to start another chapter.

Over 400 new homes are being developed on the site which has in the past hosted an institution for people with stammers, a nursery for babies evacuated from London during the Second World War and, most recently, was home to RAF Brampton, a key intelligence and training base. We are developing 210 of the new homes, providing a mix of flats and houses for rent, shared ownership and private sale. The original plans didn’t include any ‘affordable’ homes so we’re delighted to be able to offer a range of options for local people. Work is due to start on-site in the New Year.

On the right track with new homes

Our development team is ramping up its activity across the country, meaning we’re on track to achieve our target of building 1,000 new homes per year by 2018. As well as the developments in Welwyn Garden City and Huntingdon, for example, we also have contractors on-site in Clapham Park, where we are building over 240 new homes for affordable rent and sale.

Dementia aware

An ageing population means dementia is likely to touch more and more of us, whether that’s in our work or personal lives.

We’re raising awareness and understanding of this condition by recruiting 200 Dementia Friends across Metropolitan.

The Alzheimer’s Society’s Dementia Friends initiative works on the basis that a bit of understanding goes a long way. It aims to change the way people think, talk and act about dementia. This then helps those affected by the condition to continue to live their lives in the way they want, for as long as they’re able.

To find out how you can become a Dementia Friend, visit www.dementiafriends.org.uk

Good vibes at the Karma Farm

Two customers from Cambridge cooked burgers and toasted marshmallows over a campfire on a camping trip to the Karma Farm campsite in Isleham this September.

With help from their care and support workers, Ed and Steve, who live at one of our supported housing schemes, used the trip as a confidence booster in preparation for when they move on to more independent living.

Since the trip, Ed and Steve have both agreed that they feel they have a new lease of life and have plans to organise similar outings in the future.

Fright night

Customers at our service in Huntingdon enjoyed a spooky Halloween party this October. The event was organised by customers themselves at the Cambridgeshire service which provides temporary accommodation for homeless people and families.

Getting into the spirit: Customer Emma Waby and her son at the party.

Staff and customers enjoyed an Alice in Wonderland themed garden party at our supported housing service Garden Walk in Cambridge this September to raise money for Age UK. Staff across Metropolitan have been getting involved in all sorts of fundraising activities in support of Age UK over the last few months. Our original target of £10,000 was reached earlier in the year and, to date, we’ve managed to raise a whopping £18,500!
ENERGY SAVING TIPS

It saves money and it’s good for the environment – what’s not to like about saving energy in the home?
If you didn’t make it to one of our Big Energy Saving Week workshops in October and November, here are some useful tips from Citizens Advice Bureau on how to save energy this winter.

Don’t leave appliances on standby and remember not to leave laptops and mobile phones on charge unnecessarily.

Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows.

When you are doing the washing, try to fill up the machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher. One full load uses less energy than two half loads.

Always turn off the light when you leave a room.

Do a home energy check to find out about savings of up to £250 a year on household energy bills at energysavingtrust.org.uk/domestic/home-energy-check

If you have a hot water tank, set the cylinder thermostat to either 60 degrees Celsius or 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

Get a smart meter and in-home display installed when you are offered one by your energy supplier.

Ms Gupta from Derby attended one of our energy saving workshops in autumn.

“I just wanted to thank you for organising the workshop. As a result I’ve already saved £320 on my fuel bill and £180 on my water bill every year. I’ll also be able to claim the Warm Home Discount of £140 – not bad following a 2 hour workshop!”

Ms Gupta from Derby attended one of our energy saving workshops in autumn.

Web watch

It’s been a while since we last updated our website, so we’ve decided to give it a makeover – one that’s more than just pixel deep.

Early next year we’ll launch our new-look site with lots of extra features that will improve your online experience, whether you’re using a tablet, a mobile phone or your computer.

As well as updating all the content, we’ve also been streamlining the drop-down menus and adding quick links to the pages that matter to you the most. This will make it much easier for you to navigate the site.

There’ll also be new features, such as a Noticeboard page, listing community events and activities planned in your area, and the entire Care and Support section of the site will be given a new lease of life.

Finally, a website refresh wouldn’t be complete without considering social media – we’ve added social media share buttons so that you can easily share stories with your friends and online networks.

We’ll also be able to feature more video content on the website. Video is an increasingly popular way of receiving information so it’s really important we have this capability.

ACTIVATE SW8
LOVE ASHMOLE

Customers who live in Ashmole, south London, enjoyed a week of free events and activities across the estate in October half term.

Your chance to win a tablet!

We’re looking for customers to join an online website review panel. Every few months, we’ll ask members of the panel to complete a series of short exercises on our website. All of the tasks can be completed from your home computer or mobile device at a time convenient to you. We’ll use your feedback from the exercises to make improvements to the website.

As a thank you for your input, we’ll enter panel members into an annual prize draw to win a tablet. To become a member of the panel or for more information contact communications@metropolitan.org.uk

GREEN DESIGN SHORTLIST

An Edwardian terraced house that we recently renovated following a major fire has been shortlisted for the Best Green Design award at the Haringey Design Awards 2016.

When planning the refurbishment we decided to reduce the property’s carbon dioxide emissions, using funding from the government’s Retrofit for the Future project.

This has reduced the heating demand for the house by an astonishing 90%, so only a small amount of heat is now needed to keep the building and its occupants warm.

The project involved what are known as ‘Passivhaus’ principles, which involve using natural materials where possible, to achieve excellent air tightness that stops heat from escaping.

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Talent matchers

It’s not always easy to find a job that suits your skills and interests, especially when you’re young and don’t have years of work experience to draw on in an interview.

That’s why schemes such as Talent Match can make a real difference to people’s job prospects. Funded by the Big Lottery and delivered by Metropolitan, Talent Match is an employment mentoring service in Nottingham for 18 to 24 year olds who have been out of work and education for more than one year.

The project helps young people to find employment, work experience and education that fits their skill set, interests and home life commitments.

Metropolitan customer Joseph Barlow recently found work with our grounds maintenance contractor Streetwise through Talent Match. Joseph’s working hours are flexible which means he can continue to study Business Management at college while working and earning an income of his own.

Joseph says: “Talent Match has been really good! I’ve been out of stable employment for about 3 years and have struggled to get back into work. Since being on the Talent Match project I have been able to get a job working for Streetwise and it feels great to finally be employed.

“One of the best things about getting this job for me is to gain some financial and personal independence along with some great experience for myself. I would most definitely recommend Talent Match to others, this project has been so helpful to me.”

You’re hired!

If the prospect of a job interview makes you break out into a sweat, make sure you cross off our top tips on how to breeze through an interview and bag a job at the end of it.

Top 10 interview tips

1. Get to the venue early and enter the building about 10 to 15 minutes before the interview is due to start.
2. If you’re able to choose a time for your interview, avoid one just before lunchtime when your interviewer might become distracted by their stomach.
3. Do your research. Find out as much as you can about the company and its culture, and check out the company’s social media accounts.
4. Practise online using a virtual interview such as www.myworldofwork.co.uk/myinterviewtool.
5. Dress smartly but make sure you feel comfortable.
6. In the interview, if you don’t understand a question, don’t be afraid to ask for clarification.
7. Ask the interviewers your own questions about the role, the company and what it’s like to work there.
8. Show plenty of enthusiasm for the company and the role.
9. Come prepared with plenty of concrete examples to illustrate your experience.
10. Smile and make eye contact!

For more tips and advice on jobhunting, visit www.metropolitan.org.uk/jobsite

Build a career in construction

We’ve teamed up with training organisation MRG Services to offer our customers in London a place on a free two week course that will prepare you for a career in construction.

Participants will gain lots of relevant training and qualifications on the course including:
- Construction Skills Certification Scheme test training
- BTEC Health and Safety Level 1 and 2 qualification
- Fire marshal training and certification
- Manual handling training and certification
- Traffic marshalling and certification
- Interview skills, job application and employment advice
- ‘Meet the employer’ session.

If you want to take part you must be 18+, have a good level of fitness, be able to travel to south London and be actively looking for work.

For more information or to book your place contact Emmanuel Coker on 07738 713 895 or email emmanuel.coker@metropolitan.org.uk.

We’ve made it our job to help get customers into work, and our free jobs and skills service, Metroployment, has helped hundreds of our customers to do just that. In the first six months of this year alone we supported 369 customers into work.

The employment support I received helped me in a number of ways. I improved my CV and had it proofread, and I had the chance to practise my interview skills.

If you’d like help and advice on finding a job or improving your employability, visit www.metropolitan.org.uk/findajob.

Metroployment has close ties with local employment agency Hackney plays into work and I was successful in securing a position through them as an administrator for the Government’s Prevent strategy within four weeks! I would definitely recommend the service to anyone who is looking for work.

Hackney resident Catherine WB is one such customer. She’d been out of work for three months when she contacted Metroployment for help with updating her CV and for advice on how to find a job.

To find out more about how Metroployment can help you get into work, visit www.metropolitan.org.uk/jobsite.

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If you’d like help and advice on finding a job or improving your employability, visit www.metropolitan.org.uk/findajob.
Get off the sofa and get active this winter!

Fancy yourself as the next David Beckham, Darcey Bussell or Rory McIlroy? Or perhaps you’d like to try your hand at something new this winter and have fun while you’re at it?

We’re running a programme of activities for young people aged 8 to 25 this winter, and most of them are totally free! From multisports sessions and football, to golf, dance and lots more, there’s bound to be a sport or activity to suit you.

Or, if you’re aged 16 or over and interested in coaching sport yourself, we’ve teamed up with the StreetGames Training Academy to get you the training you need for free! Not only will you learn lots of useful coaching techniques, you’ll also gain valuable mentoring skills and youth work experience through the programme.

For more information about any of these opportunities, contact Saba Yazdani on 020 3535 3925 or email saba.yazdani@metropolitan.org.uk

Young customers in Dragons’ Den challenge

Children from across our London estates took part in a Dragons’ Den style challenge to create a new educational game in August.

The challenge, organised with non-profit organisation Tutors United, took place at summer school sessions with the aim of improving the pupils’ maths and English skills.

Neighbourhood Investment and housing staff from Metropolitan formed a panel and played judge as children from years 4, 5 and 6 pitched educational game or toy ideas to them.

The sessions were held at our community centres in Chalkhill, Ashmole, Roundshaw, Moorlands and Canalside.

Some of the games and toys conjured up by the kids included ‘Math Dash’, a snakes-and-ladders style board game with a mathematical twist, and ‘Super Snotty Mathematician’, a toy robot that challenges children with maths questions – and squirts green gunk if players answer incorrectly!

Abdullah Sarwar, who took part in the session at the Chalkhill estate in Brent, said: “At first I was scared when I saw the judges, but they encouraged me to do my best and made me feel proud of myself after the presentation.”

If you know someone who took part, see if you can find them in the video of the event at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLr8CcS6KqO#t=32

Benefit cap - make sure you’re in the know

How much do you know about Universal Credit and the benefit cap? Do you know how these changes will affect you?

The government has started to roll out lower limits for the amount of benefits people aged 16 to 64 can receive. This is being done in stages across the country, so if you claim benefits, don’t get caught out – check how the changes will affect you here.

If you don’t know whether the changes will affect you, or you think they might but you’re not sure how, call us on 020 3535 3535 or email moneymatters@metropolitan.org.uk.

We can help guide you through the changes and offer advice and support on budgeting, managing debt and finding work.
Your home

Your online DIY resource

If you’ve ever wondered how to bleed a radiator, change a toilet seat or reset a tripped fuse, check out our step-by-step guides at www.metropolitan.org.uk/fixit.

These are some of the small jobs that customers are often responsible for fixing themselves, but we know not everyone is confident when it comes to DIY. So, next time you need to find your stopcock or change a lightbulb, remember to log on to our website, and let us guide you through the process, step by step!

On the record

We have recently started to record calls that we make to you (we do this already for calls you make to us) to help us improve the service we provide. Recording calls means we can now monitor them for training purposes. It also means that if customers aren’t happy with a call or the advice given, we can listen back, making it quicker and easier to deal with any complaints.

Christmas rent reminder

The festive season is upon us again which for many of us means over-eating, over-indulging and, of course, over-spending. With Christmas adverts bombarding us from all angles and the pester power of youngsters (and the not so young!), we know there can be pressure to spend, spend, spend.

So that you’re filled with festive cheer rather than financial worries, make sure that when setting out your budget, you put your rent and utility bills at the top of the list: these are priority payments which need to be made throughout the year – nobody wants extra stress by putting their home or utility supplies at risk.

If you find paying rent or bills a struggle at Christmas - or any other time of year for that matter - we have a dedicated team who can provide the right support to manage your income and outgoings effectively.

New Year is the time for making resolutions, so if you have any worries about managing money, put contacting us at the top of your list!

Contact us on 020 3535 3535 or email moneymatters@metropolitan.org.uk.

Stepping up

Metropolitan customer Nancy Rowe realised her dream of owning a greater share in her shared ownership home by staircasing.

Staircasing enables home owners who bought through Shared Ownership to increase the amount of equity they own in their home.

The greater the share you own in your home, the less rent you pay. If you staircase to 100% ownership you become the outright owner of your home with no rent obligations.

Nancy recently completed the staircasing process to increase the share she owns in her property from 25% to 65%. As a result she now pays around £300 on rent and £700 on her mortgage. Nancy said: “It’s been really smooth sailing and it took just under two months.”

Nancy purchased a greater share of her home through staircasing

Introducing our winter selection of new homes available to buy through Shared Ownership and Private Sale

THE POINT, GANTS HILL

FROM £96,250
(35% SHARE)

A selection of modern one and two bedroom apartments
owned through Shared Ownership.

SIX HILLS HOUSE, STEVENAGE

FROM £42,213
(35% SHARE)

Hurry! Last phase of one and two bedroom apartments
available to own through Shared Ownership.

TIMES SQUARE, WELwyn Garden City

FROM £159,950
(Shared Ownership & Private Sale)

A selection of one, two and
three bedroom apartments.
Shared Ownership apartments
to be released early next year.

020 3535 2555
mhosales@metropolitan.org.uk
mho.co.uk
Christmas and New Year opening hours

Our out-of-hours contact centre will be open 24/7 throughout the festive period for reporting emergency repairs. **Just call 020 3535 3535.**

If you want to visit us in person, please be aware that our main offices will be closed on the following days:

- Monday 26 December
- Tuesday 27 December
- Monday 2 January

Some of our opening hours at local offices may vary. Contact your local office for more information.

How to contact us

✉️ PO Box 10262, Nottingham NG8 9LE
📞 020 3535 3535
✉️ contactus@metropolitan.org.uk
🌐 www.metropolitan.org.uk

We want all of our customers to be able to understand the information we provide. The contents of this magazine can be made available in a number of other languages and alternative formats including **large print.**