ALL CHANGE!

After six years, it’s time to say farewell to @Metropolitan with this final mini edition, as we look to an exciting future as Metropolitan Thames Valley and a new magazine, which will have stories from across North London and the East of England. We’ll also include regular updates from your resident representatives, whose input is essential to the way we do things by making sure that your voices are heard. Reviewing and improving how we engage with all our customers is critical to our success and we hope you’ll get involved.

A new future as two become one

Thank you to everyone who got involved in our resident consultation on our proposal to join forces with Thames Valley Housing. Having considered the comments and feedback we received, the Metropolitan Board has decided to go ahead with the partnership and from this October we will become Metropolitan Thames Valley.

We’re really excited about the partnership as it will enable us to invest more in our communities, build more affordable homes and improve the services we provide you with. We’ll be writing to all customers to confirm the decision but, if you’d like to find out more in the meantime, please visit www.metropolitan.org.uk/partnership.

Volunteers get handy

A school in Enfield for children with profound learning disabilities had a makeover thanks to a team of colleague volunteers. More than 20 colleagues, along with volunteers from the school and builders’ merchant Travis Perkins, gave a total of 240 hours of free time to revamp Waverley School. The team brightened up classrooms, redecorated the assembly hall, and donated a bench for pupils to sit on in the courtyard garden which was also overhauled.

Head teacher, Gail Weir (pictured above, far right) said: “I’m delighted by the work. Seeing the spruced up rooms will be a lovely surprise for our students.”

Rolling back the years

Joan Rowley lives in Edmonton and, at 84, is an active member of her local community. Not only has she run Cancer Research Race for Life seven times, she’s also walked every bridge and park in London to raise money! One of Joan’s claims to fame is that she was asked to appear on the cover of the Rolling Stones ‘Honky Tonk Women’ record. Joan told us: “They were lovely guys. I was a bit shy but drummer Charlie Watts took me under his wing and made sure I was ok.”
**THE YEAR IN NUMBERS**

From building new homes for rent and sale, supporting customers into paid work and investing in modernising more homes than ever, to developing new care and support services, fixing repairs first time and making homes safer in the wake of the Grenfell tragedy, here are some of the highlights of what we’ve delivered over the last year:

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>623</strong> new homes built</th>
<th><strong>5,870</strong> in our development pipeline</th>
<th><strong>£84 million</strong> on maintaining and modernising homes, including:</th>
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<tr>
<td>83% of repairs fixed first time (and 99% customer satisfaction with Metworks)</td>
<td>1,026 customers supported into work</td>
<td><strong>1,058</strong> new kitchens</td>
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<td><strong>£4 million</strong> secured for new care and support contracts in our specialist areas (older people, mental health and transitional services aimed at vulnerable people)</td>
<td><strong>£187,000</strong> reduction in rent arrears by targeting support towards customers at risk, in particular those affected by the roll-out of Universal Credit</td>
<td><strong>510</strong> new bathrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2,180</strong> new boilers</td>
<td><strong>623</strong> new homes built</td>
<td><strong>£187,000</strong> reduction in rent arrears by targeting support towards customers at risk, in particular those affected by the roll-out of Universal Credit</td>
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We’re now looking forward to achieving even more in the coming year - and beyond - as Metropolitan Thames Valley.

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**News at your fingertips**

The way people access news has changed and we’re changing too to keep up! We already post news and details of what’s going in your area online and are active on Twitter and Facebook.

We’re now going digital with your new-look regional newsletter so, if we have your email address, in the future you’ll receive your copy in your inbox, rather than your letterbox. As we know that some customers prefer to get a copy in the post, we’ll continue to print copies too. If you’d like to receive a digital copy and we don’t have your email address, please let us know. And remember, if you’d prefer not to receive general information from us that doesn’t relate to your tenancy and is addressed to you personally, you can call us on **020 3535 3535** to opt out.
As one of the largest housing associations in the country, making an investment of around £100m each year into our 57,000 homes, Metropolitan Thames Valley will be an influential client that suppliers want to work with us. We recently set up a Property Procurement Board to oversee a project to reprocure all of our property services which will enable us to establish relationships with contractors – both new and existing - that deliver a high quality service and a great customer experience. A number of customers sit on the Board, ensuring your voices are heard.

Mark Everard, Executive Director of Property, commented, “Our reprocurement project is all about getting the best possible value out of our contracts so that we can invest more in maintaining our homes, which is what customers tell us matters most to them. Having attracted in excess of 220 companies who want to work with us at recent procurement events we’re confident that this refocused commercial approach will help us deliver just that.”

How to get ready for Universal Credit

There’s lots about Universal Credit that is different, from how you claim it (online only), to how it’s paid (into a bank account only) and how often it’s paid (monthly, in arrears).

But for now, if you receive Housing Benefit (HB), the key things to remember are that:

- HB payments will no longer come to us directly. This means you will need to set up regular payments – ideally via Direct Debit
- It takes at least SIX weeks (and can take over TEN weeks) from the date you make a claim until you receive your first payment
- You still have to pay your rent during this time or your tenancy will be at risk
- The average rent arrears that customers owe by NOT getting ready is £1200.

How can I get ready?

- The first thing you should do is start saving now so you don’t get into arrears and put your tenancy at risk
- Get in touch with us today on 020 3535 3535 so our team of friendly, helpful money experts can support you to keep on top of things.

A new bursary programme is open to Metropolitan residents who may benefit from a little financial support to cover training-related costs.

With up to £600 per person available to cover anything from course fees to equipment or childcare, these one-off payments can make all the difference between signing up for training or not.

If you’re interested, simply email your name and a contact number to training@metropolitan.org.uk. We’ll then call you back to see if you’re eligible and to talk about your options. Once you’ve completed your training we’ll also be able to support you in finding work in the related field.

Negotiating new contracts will deliver better value

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If you believe, you can achieve!

In the last year we supported almost 400 local residents in the region into paid work. This year we’re running the six week Transform & Achieve programme to help even more residents do the same. The programme, supported by JP Morgan, covers not only employment skills, but also fitness, health, nutrition and managing money. A delegate who secured a job with the NHS told us: “After being unemployed and inactive for over two years I signed up – and am I glad I did! The two-day per week course is all about how positive thinking and it’s really helped me feel good about myself again!”

If you live in East London, email transformandachieve@metropolitan.org.uk or call Kemi Dania free on 0800 032 3334 today to find out more.

All the fun of the Festival

Local residents were out in force to enjoy this summer’s Chalkhill Festival in Wembley. As well as delicious food to eat and stalls to browse, there was a great line-up of entertainment, including an Elvis impersonator, Chinese Dragons, the Chalkhill Choir, street dancers, Levi Roots and headline act former X Factor contestant, Micha B.

From sunburn to business success

Hackney resident Damian Paul is turning the tables on sunburn, after waking up burnt on a Gambian beach. Damian told us: “I asked the local people how they moisturise and their protect their skin and learnt things I never knew, such as how they rub bamboo cream on babies to cure eczema.”

He returned home with new knowledge and natural oils and began to experiment, eventually hitting on a winning formula which turned into his ‘Something Different’ product range. As interest grew, Damian wondered if he could set up in business.

That’s where Neighbourhood Investment officer Saiful Alam stepped in. “Saiful simplified my ideas and gave me really insightful advice,” Damien says. “We’re now applying for funding from the Government–backed Social Innovation Fund to help me set up as a social enterprise.”

If you have a business idea, or want to find out about training or support into work, please call us on 020 3535 3535.