

# my GREAT PLACE

Winter 2016

The magazine for Great Places Housing Group residents



## Community Stars Awards Now Open!

Nominate an unsung hero from your community



# Get in touch



Email us:  
[cat@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:cat@greatplaces.org.uk)

Or email us about a repair at:  
[repairs@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:repairs@greatplaces.org.uk)



Phone us between 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday:  
**0300 123 1966 (local rate)**  
**Select option 1 for repairs**



Text us on:  
**07797 870 734**

## Our opening times over the festive season:

**24 December** (Christmas Eve) Closed  
**25 December** (Christmas Day) Closed  
**26 December** (Boxing Day) Closed  
**27 December** (Bank Holiday) Closed  
**28 December** 8am–4pm

**29 December** 8am–4pm  
**30 December** 8am–4pm  
**31 December** (New Year's Eve) Closed  
**1 January** (New Year's Day) Closed  
**2 January** (Bank Holiday) Closed

## Kids' Competition

If you have any questions or comments specifically about My Great Place, contact:

Communications  
Great Places  
Southern Gate  
729 Princess Road  
Manchester M20 2LT

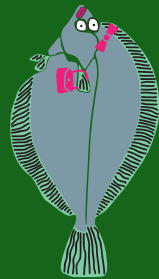
Email:  
[communications@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:communications@greatplaces.org.uk)

 Find us on Facebook at  
[facebook.com/GreatPlacesHousing](https://www.facebook.com/GreatPlacesHousing)

 Tweet us @MyGreatPlace

### Access for all

We've already sent a magnifying sheet to our visually impaired residents. Let us know if you need one. An audio version of My Great Place is also available.



Margaret Plaice is our little fishy friend – and she's hiding somewhere in this magazine. Can you find her? If you can, just email or write and let us know exactly where she is (make sure you put the page number) at the address on the left, making sure you put your address and phone number on the entry. The winning entry will get their hands on a cute little iPod, so get searching!

Entrants must be 16 or under and Great Places residents.

Entries must be received by 1 March 2017.

Summer 2016 winner: Sami Essabi (aged 10), Timperley

Cover stars:  
Winners at last year's Community Stars Awards



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investor in excellence



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

As 2016 draws to a close, we've once again worked with a panel of customers to create your 2016 Customer Annual Report. The report aims to show you how well we're doing at meeting your needs, as well as providing photo highlights of Great Places' homes, communities, and people. You can find the report on pages 7-16.

Award season is also just around the corner at Great Places and it's time to celebrate the unsung heroes in your community. Nominations are now open so get in touch and tell us about which neighbours you think deserve some time in the spotlight. You can find all the information on award categories and how to enter on page 4.

This issue of My Great Place is filled with festive tips, from shopping savvy on the run up to Christmas, to keeping your

home warm and your bills low as the temperature drops over the coming months.

Finally, there are plenty of new ways to win this issue! Visit page 21 to learn about a new feature coming soon to My Great Place, which you can get involved in, as well as an opportunity for amateur photographers to get their work recognised. As usual, our spot the difference and wordsearches can be found on the back page.

We wish you all the best for the festive season – see you in 2017!

*Adele*



## What's inside?

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### Changes to the way you pay

We have recently made some important changes to the way we take payments over the phone.

Where currently customers are asked to read out their card details for us to input on our system, you will now be asked to use your phone keypad instead.

This change will provide further protection around your personal information as it means that your data is given directly to AllPay by you.



Community Stars nominations are open!

pages **4-5**



Customer Annual Report

pages **7-16**



Check, switch and save!

page **20**

# GREAT PLACES COMMUNITY STARS AWARDS



Is there someone in your neighbourhood who you think should have some time in the spotlight? Who are the unsung heroes in your community who deserve recognition?



**You can help a star in your community get the recognition they deserve by nominating them for one of the categories in our Community Stars Awards!**

All Great Places residents can nominate an individual, group or project. The closing date is Sunday 22 January 2017, so get in touch to let us know who you think shines in your community.

We'll be holding a special awards ceremony in April 2017 to celebrate the hard work that residents and community groups put in to make their community a better place. Look out for information about the nominees and the winners on our website and in future issues of My Great Place.

**GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD** A person who goes out of their way to care for others in their neighbourhood – maybe they help with an older person's shopping, provide a shoulder to cry on, support neighbours in times of need, or help to bring the street together for social events.

**YOUNG RESIDENT AWARD** A person aged 25 or under who has worked to improve their area, made a positive difference to someone else's life, stood up to bullying, hate crime, racism or other forms of anti-social behaviour, or shown particular bravery.

**COMMUNITY PROJECT AWARD** Do you know a standout project in your area that has impressed you? Has it transformed the place where you live or brought people together?

**COMMUNITY RESIDENTS GROUP AWARD** A group of residents who've pulled together to make a significant difference to where they live. Maybe they've helped to bring improvements to your building, set up social events to bring the community together, or raised money to transform green space near your home.

**GREEN CHAMPION** An individual who is committed to making a big environmental impact and has made a difference to their community. This could be looking after a community garden, helping at a community allotment or promoting community recycling.

**SENIOR RESIDENT AWARD** A person aged 70 or over who works tirelessly to improve their community. They may have been working in their neighbourhood for years and never received recognition.

**SUPPORTED HOUSING RESIDENT AWARD** A person who lives in one of our supported housing schemes who has made a real difference to their own life or to the lives of others. They may have gone the extra mile to help a fellow resident, started up a group, or got involved in a community initiative.

**SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEME AWARD** Is there one of our projects which stands head and shoulders above the rest? Has it become an important part of the community? It could be a scheme for young people, young parents, homeless, alcohol dependants, or those with mental health issues.

**COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD** This person will already be an important part of the community. Maybe they run the local youth club or help in the local school as a volunteer. They might be a key person in the local church or the chief organiser of the community fair.

**GREAT PLACES STAFF AWARD** Is there someone from Great Places who has gone the extra mile for residents? Who do you think embodies our vision: Great homes. Great communities. Great people.

## HOW TO ENTER – IT'S EASY

You can nominate someone in any of the following ways:

**Online:** [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/communitystars16](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/communitystars16)

**Email:** [maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:maria.morris@greatplaces.org.uk)

**Phone:** 0161 447 5076

**Post:** Maria Morris, FREEPOST RLSC-HLLJ-EZRZ, Great Places, Southern Gate, 729 Princess Road, Manchester, M20 2LT.

**CLOSING DATE: SUNDAY 22 JANUARY**

# A new look for Lark Hill!

Lark Hill Community Primary School in Salford has unveiled its new sensory garden!

The garden was a project by Greenfingers, Great Places, and Kier Contractors, designed to be a calming, interactive space for pupils with special educational needs.

It boasts an edible garden for hands-on learning around the importance of healthy eating, a gazebo for outdoor lessons in all weathers, and an array of plants and flowers chosen specifically for their appearance, scent and texture.



**Before...**



**...After!**

**Above:** Great Places staff and board members lend a hand with the new edible garden!

# Your Customer Annual Report 2016

**Having difficulty reading this report?**  
Please call us on 0300 123 1966 and we'll provide you with a magnifying sheet.

## Contents

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## Welcome

Last year's Customer Annual Report went on to win a prestigious housing honour so we've continued with our award-winning formula this year, again working with a panel of customers.

The panel provided feedback on what information they felt was most important to people living in Great Places communities as well as how we can design the report in a way that is clear and easy to understand.

By working with customers to create this document we aim to make sure that it really is your Customer Annual Report – containing the information that matters most to you, so you can monitor how we go about creating great homes, great communities, and supporting great people.

I know one topic that really matters to our customers is our repairs service. I'm pleased to report that during 2015/16 we completed 83% of repairs on the first visit to a customer's home

(compared with 75% the previous year). We also made sure 100% of our homes were gas safety compliant. For more information on this, please see page 11.

Many thanks to all those customers involved in creating what hopefully will be a helpful, interesting read.

There are lots of ways for you to get involved in helping us to shape our services to make sure they meet the needs of you and your community, while developing new skills along the way. So if you'd like more information on this, please contact us (see page 17 for contact details).

**Matthew Harrison**  
Chief executive,  
Great Places Housing Group



# Finance

## Where our money comes from:

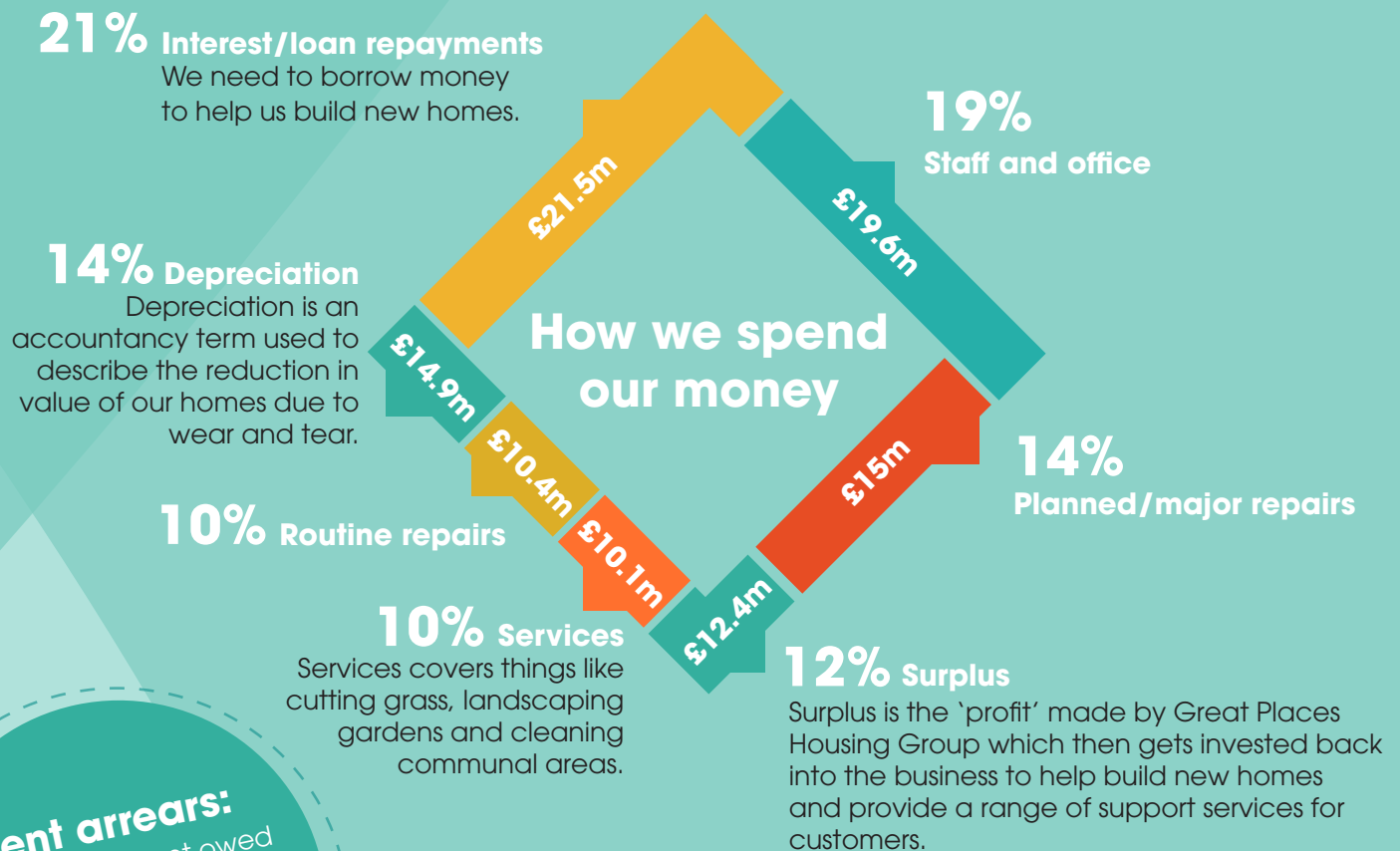
Rent and service charges  
Other social housing activities  
Developments for sale  
Commercial activities

£82.9m (80% of total turnover)  
£13.9m (13% of total turnover)  
£6.1m (6% of total turnover)  
£1.0m (1% of total turnover)

## Total turnover for 2015/16

(the amount of money Great Places collected)

**£103.9m**



### Rent arrears:

The amount of rent owed which has not yet been paid. The lower the percentage the better as this means more rent is being paid on time.

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
General Needs – current arrears including housing benefit	3.3% (£2.0m)	3.4% (£2.0m)	👍
Supported Housing (directly managed schemes) – current arrears including housing benefit	4.5% (£148,000)	4.3% (£150,000)	👎
Customer satisfaction that rent is value for money	85.9% (818 responses)	82% (799 responses)	👍



# Tenancy

**Great Places is required to let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.**

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Re-let days	23.9 days	28.5 days	👍
Total void loss	£291,783	£427,000	👍
Average void cost per property	£898	£1,711	👍
Satisfaction with new homes	98% (159 responses)	97% (145 responses)	👍

## What do we mean by re-let days?

The number of days between the previous customer moving out of a property and the new customer moving in.

## What is void loss?

Void loss is the amount of rent not collected by Great Places due to our properties remaining vacant for any period of time.

## What does average void cost per property mean?

How much we spend on making each empty property ready for a new customer to move in.

## How do we ensure that our new homes are meeting the needs of our customers?

Our development team work closely with colleagues across Great Places and look at other new homes built in the local area to ensure that the style, layout and features of our new homes reflect the needs of individual communities.

We also invite all our new home customers to provide feedback about what works well and what could be improved in the future such as access, storage, energy efficiency, refuse removal and garden design.



# Your homes

**We've invested more into improving and maintaining your homes than ever before - with a total investment of £25 million.**

## Improving homes — what we've achieved

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?
New kitchens	627	628
Homes with new windows	278	367
New bathrooms and wet rooms	505	409
New boilers	783	607
New doors	808	605

### How do we decide which properties need improvement work?

Work is planned using a sophisticated database, which records the age and condition of the major elements of each Great Places home.

We also make planning decisions based on feedback from customers and Great Places staff about the condition of a property or communal space.

This information is constantly refreshed by our 'stock condition surveyors' who complete reviews of 2000 individual properties each year.

### How do we manage the allocation of repairs jobs?

Jobs are allocated by offering an appointment to a customer based on the urgency of the work required and availability of suitable resources. We attend emergency jobs within four hours and non-emergency jobs within 28 days at a date and time convenient to the customer.



**Did you know...**  
Our repairs helpdesk took 75,000 calls in 2015/16!

## Repairing homes — what we've achieved

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Number of repairs completed	43,000	41,000	👍
Number of repairs fixed first time	83% (35,674)	75% (30,750)	👍
Number of repairs appointments kept	85% (36,616)	82% (35,337)	👍
Customer repairs calls lost	3% (1,941)	3% (2,162)	👍
Customer satisfaction with repairs call handling	94% (745 responses)	96% (622 responses)	👎
Customer satisfaction with overall repairs service	91% (740 responses)	89% (622 responses)	👍

## How do we ensure your homes are safe and compliant?

Your safety is our number one priority, so we carry out regular checks to ensure your home is safe and compliant with various regulations. During 2015/16 we achieved the following:

- 100% of properties checked for gas safety
- 100% of property communal areas with in date fire risk assessments
- Maintenance checks of over 97% of elevators
- 100% of planned asbestos inspections carried out in communal areas
- 100% of water safety checks completed

We're also continuing with our three year project to test all of our homes for electrical safety certificates. So far, we have tested 91% of homes, which now have valid certificates, and we are on track to get this figure to 100% by 31 March 2017.

**Lost calls:**  
A lost call is a call that rings for over 15 seconds and the customer hangs up before we have a chance to answer it. We record all instances of this and try and call customers back at a later time where resources allow.  
Our lost call rate is better than the 5.4% average recorded by 32 other UK housing associations.



# Customers and communities

**Great Places' vision isn't just to build great homes but to also create great communities, supported by great people. We continue to support thriving neighbourhoods and work to transform the lives of our customers.**

## Funding the development of great people and great communities

Our Residents' Fund and Shared Spaces Fund provide a pot of money to help the people and places in Great Places' communities to shine.

During 2015/16, our Customer Funding Panel reviewed/scored 38 Resident and Shared Spaces Fund applications and approved £121,000 worth of projects. This funding helps Great Places customers and community groups to achieve their goals – this year projects included room hire for a community knitting group, summer activities for a youth group and a gardening project for one of our supported schemes.





## How did we handle anti-social behaviour (ASB) and community safety cases?

Over the last 12 months, the number of ASB cases has risen, while the levels of satisfaction have decreased. On the surface, this may seem like a step back; however, despite a challenging year for the public sector, including cuts to police and other community services, we are continuing to adapt our processes to respond to higher demand wherever necessary and have made a number of positive changes during 2015/16.

We upgraded our ASB reporting out of hours provision. Customers can now call 0300 123 1966 any day or night to report ASB, improving community safety and peace of mind. This change to the service may have contributed to the number of ASB cases reported over the last year, as we've made it easier for our customers to report any issues.

We continued to invest in independent mediation services to assist and empower customers to find a resolution to issues with nuisance behaviour, and during 2015/16 we increased the number of cases Great Places staff were able to resolve through early intervention to nearly 600.

We also successfully obtained 24 injunctions in particularly severe cases. While this number may seem high, legal action is always a last resort and only used where necessary. In cases where an injunction has been obtained, it was felt that this would be the best course of action to protect the individuals and communities, which is our ultimate objective.

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Number of ASB cases	1520	1069	
How long it takes to close a case	60 days	59 days	
Customer satisfaction with handling of ASB cases	82% (62 responses)	90% (134 responses)	
Customer satisfaction with outcome of ASB cases	72% (62 responses)	90% (134 responses)	

## Celebrating our community stars

The outstanding contributions of our customers in helping us to create great communities were again recognised at our annual Community Stars Awards 2016.

Over 200 customers attended the ceremony at Gorton Monastery – with 11 winner and 13 runner-up awards being handed out.

Nominations are now open for this year’s Community Stars Awards, please see page 4 for more details.



## How do we pass savings onto residents?

We’ve provided lots of support to customers over the last year regarding what benefits they can claim and how Universal Credit works – including customer surveys to better understand our customers’ experiences with the Universal Credit process so that we can provide suitable support.



We’ve also continued to help hundreds of customers to cut down their energy use and save money on energy, particularly through our ‘check, switch and save’ events. These events provide energy efficient gadgets, as well as offering advice on how to cut down their home energy use, switch to a cheaper tariff, and reduce heat loss during the colder months.

	2015/16	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Number of households helped into employment, voluntary opportunities and training	361	338	👍
Savings passed onto customers through benefit advice, utility savings and affordable credit	£1.2 million	£1.0 million	👍
Number of Community Stars Award nominations received	135	111	👍

# Putting customers first

**Did you know...**  
Customers took part in over 3000 engagement activities over the past year to help to shape Great Places' services!

## Customer involvement and empowerment

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Number of repairs appointments audited by customers	250	135	
Number of customer calls audited by customers	180	270	

## How have customers been involved in monitoring performance, shaping policy and scrutinising our services?

Our customer scrutiny group 'Insight' completed two service reviews around community safety and communications (specifically 'how we keep customers informed') and made a total of 43 recommendations, which were agreed by the Great Places Board. These include:

### Community Safety

- Make it easier for customers to report incidents by developing the function and availability of the duty officer.
- Increase promotion of the service to customers and the action that can be taken in response to customer reports, including case studies encouraging customers to report incidents.
- Refresher training for the 'Out of Hours' service staff to ensure consistent service delivery.

### Communications

- Enhance communications by increasing ways Great Places keep customers informed digitally, for example social media, email and online via our website.
- Ensure methods of communication can be easily accessed by all Great Places customers.
- Increase promotion of alternative communication formats, particularly to customers more likely to require these.
- To promote widely the opportunities offered to customers to be involved to help develop, influence and shape customer communication.




Our Customer Funding Panel reviewed/scored 38 Resident and Shared Spaces Fund applications – learn more about these on page 12.

Our team of customer call auditors reviewed 430 calls (repairs appointments and general customer calls) into Great Places, scoring out customer services officers on a number of factors, including their knowledge and customer service.

16 customers worked with our communications team to develop our Customer Annual Report.

**Interested in getting involved in helping to improve Great Places' services?**  
Please contact us by texting 07797 870 734, emailing [cat@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:cat@greatplaces.org.uk) or calling 0300 123 1966.

## Customer service and complaints

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Result
Customers satisfied with Great Places overall	88% (848 responses)	86% (808 responses)	
Number of of formal complaints received	327	325	
Customers satisfied with the way complaints are handled	76% (42 customers surveyed)	59% (106 customers surveyed)	

### How have we increased customer satisfaction with our Customer Access Team?

Our Customer Access Team (contact centre) has completed additional training in a number of key areas over the last 12 months to help improve the service you receive. These include the arrears process, community safety cases, and customer service. A 24/7 automated rent payment line has also been introduced to make payments easier and more convenient.

**Did you know...**  
Our contact centre took 65,000 calls in 2015/16!

### What have we learnt from complaints?

Complaints are an invaluable opportunity to understand where our services have failed to meet customer expectations and make improvements to ensure this does not occur in the future. Our service managers review the detail of every resolved complaint to ensure that key learnings are identified. These are collated on our complaints learning log and shared across the group.

### How do we find out how satisfied customers are with our services?

We regularly contact customers by phone and email to find out how well our services are meeting your needs. This year we also introduced text messaging as a method of capturing feedback which is often more convenient for customers.

We also use a group of call auditors who listen to a selection of calls made by the customer access team, allowing us to get a better understanding of the impact of the service we provide from a customer point of view.

### Meeting the diverse needs of customers

Our key values include 'we know, respect and care about our customers' and 'we are fair, open and accountable'. We continue to work individually and collectively to ensure that we put these values into daily practice and demonstrate that we understand the diverse needs our customers.

We also continued to show our support for diversity within our communities by participating in the annual Manchester Pride festival. This year we joined up with a number of other local housing organisations and walked the parade route under the 'HouseProud' banner.



# Supported housing

Our supported housing service provides over 2,300 places for a variety of vulnerable people including the homeless, young mums, young people, alcohol dependants, those with mental health issues, and older people.



## How do we help customers to reach these goals?

When a new customer moves into one of our supported housing schemes or receives a support package we work alongside them to help them identify their goals and strengths and we develop an aspirational and dynamic support plan. We then support them every step of the way to achieve their goals and greater independence before they move on from our service into their own home.

## Key developments during 2015/16

- Our general needs tenancy sustainment team helped to prevent 142 Great Places tenants from losing their home and 182 tenants with benefit issues, with a total of 456 benefit issues.
- The customers at In Partnership have been supported to open a small shop on scheme which has provided them with volunteering opportunities and increased skills to help them secure future employment.
- A number of residents at Next Step successfully completed a painting and decorating course with the support of Back on Track. Residents painted ground floor communal areas of the scheme, increasing their skills and confidence. The appearance of the building has greatly improved, which has generated a real sense of home pride.
- Lorna Lodge in Wythenshawe partnered with local charity, Young Persons Support Foundation to allow all residents to complete a 'tenancy move on' course, explaining their rights and duties as a tenant and giving practical advice on managing their own tenancy.
- Residents from our sheltered and extra care schemes in Manchester, Salford and Blackpool continued to meet on a quarterly basis to help shape improvements to the service.
- A number internal grants were awarded to schemes for cooking, budgeting and independent living courses, as well as to individual residents for college courses and essential equipment to improve employment opportunities.

## Supported housing — customer successes

	2015/2016	How does this compare with 2014/15?	Results
Number of customers who completed a planned move on	97%	85%	
Number of customers who maximised their income	95%	95%	
Number of customers who progressed with training and education	75%	84%	





## Fact!

The term 'aids and adaptations' covers all equipment that enables independent living - from small fittings such as grab rails or lever taps to large structural changes such as wet rooms and ramps.

Great Places' customer scrutiny group, INSIGHT, is pleased to report that they have finished their fourth service review. The service area chosen was aids and adaptations – an important service for customers who need some extra support to enable them to remain living in their home.

During their review, the group interviewed 11 members of Great Places staff and consulted with 91 customers who had made requests for an adaptation during the last 12 months. They then presented 15 recommendations for improvement to the Board. These included:

- Publicise details of the aids and adaptation service to make customers aware that the service is available
- Provide clear and relevant information to customers around what to expect from the process
- Collect customer feedback around adaptations
- Understand customer demand for adapted properties

I wanted to take part in the consultation to promote this service. I encourage everyone who needs support to ask for the assistance they require - it can make a big difference to your health and wellbeing. The wet room I had fitted following a hip operation has given me back my independence and dignity.

**- Mrs Harries, Rochdale**

A full set of report recommendations can be found on the Great Places website under on the 'INSIGHT scrutiny group' page under the 'where you live' heading.

INSIGHT is a way for Great Places customers to influence the services we provide. The group is currently made up of six volunteer customers who do various scrutiny tasks such as attending meetings, providing comment on Great Places publications (including policies and procedures), interviewing customers, and writing reports.

My stairlift has improved my quality of life but I found the process lengthy. I felt this would be useful feedback for the team so they can improve the service for future users. It's so important that we can access aids and adaptations when needed and are made aware of the variety of services Great Places offer.

**- Mrs Smith, Salford**

The group is always looking for new members who can help with scrutiny. This could be full or part time, from home or from a Great Places office. If you are curious about scrutinising services and you feel you have the right skills for the job, contact Tracy Gregory on 0161 447 5020 or email at [tracy.gregory@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:tracy.gregory@greatplaces.org.uk).

Many thanks to all customers who generously gave their time to provide feedback in the aids and adaptations review!

I wanted to feed back that the process of getting a through-floor lift for my son was straight-forward and pain free. The adaptation has massively improved our lives - huge, huge improvement!

**- Mrs Jones, Morecambe**

# neighbourhood News

What's going on where you live...



Cruden Construction, Great Places and Aickman Place residents celebrate the launch of the new development

## Home sweet new homes in Burnley

The final families have now moved in to a new batch of canal-side homes in Burnley. Resident Takeel snapped up one of the affordable rental properties with her family and said, "I have been really pleased with the process of moving to Aickman Place. By saving money on my deposit, I have been able to spend more on making the house my own and I definitely see this as being a long-term home for my family!"



Attendees getting stuck into Get Cooking's 'Cooking on a Budget' session.

## Job hunting in Morecambe

Morecambe's Young People's Service recently hosted an event with Great Places and Job Centre Plus to help anyone searching for work.

The event was a great success with approximately 25 attending and plenty of support on hand – from mock interviews and help with CVs to transport advice and healthy cooking tips!

## Going bananas for World Food Day

Great Places residents celebrated World Food Day in style this year across the north west. Community food festivals took place in Longsight and Oldham, where plenty of locals took part in cooking demonstrations and pledged to try and end world hunger.

A special thank you goes to Sainsbury's in Knutsford, who donated free food (including plenty of bananas) to the Welcome Cafe!



Free bananas for the Welcome Cafe, Knutsford!



Representatives from Great Places, Salix Homes, Langworthy Cornerstone and the Claremont and Waste Opportunities Club celebrating the launch with residents

## New opportunities club launches in Salford

A new opportunities club in Langworthy is dedicated to getting Salford residents into work and improving their lives. The club offers free information and advice around personal health and saving money; training and upskilling in computers and technology; and assistance with job hunting. The club runs every Wednesday at Langworthy Cornerstone between 10am and 12pm. For more information email [cwoc.club@gmail.com](mailto:cwoc.club@gmail.com).



Pupil Ella on the reception desk at Southern Gate

## Great Places: More than just bricks and mortar!

In July, three young people from St Peter's RC High School, and who live in Great Places homes in Northmoor, joined Great Places for ten days work experience. The students visited our supported housing schemes, shadowed a number of teams in our Didsbury office and learned more about how we help our communities.



Neighbourhood officer Andrew Williams, resident services co-ordinator Kay Graham and neighbourhood manager Ben Barraclough.

## Park Hill's elephant-astic sculpture

Over summer a herd of elephant sculptures appeared at various points around Sheffield – and we'd like to trumpet this one, which was placed in one of our most iconic schemes, Park Hill.

The elephants have now been auctioned off in aid of Sheffield Children's Hospital, raising over £400,000 in total!

## Award winning community group!

Knutsford residents, Greenfingers employees and Great Places staff attended the North West in Bloom awards last month. Rowena Acton, Jimmy Acton and Kane Gunter run the 'Community Spirit' group who look after the grot spots on Longridge and Shaw Heath and were thrilled to take home the 'Thriving Award' for their efforts for the fifth year running! The group partnered up with Greenfingers and were commended on their partnership working. Congratulations to all involved!



Residents and Greenfingers employees at the North West in Bloom awards

## Talking about our generation!

'Limitless' is a new youth engagement group set up to allow our younger customers to make a difference in the area they live by deciding what is important to them. With support and funding from a number of organisations, including Langworthy Cornerstone, Salix Homes and the University of Salford, they then set about making changes happen!

The group is open to customers aged 12-19 and meets weekly at Langworthy Cornerstone. If you think this might be for you, please contact Roisin Heavey for a chat on 07760754491 or email [roisin.heavey@salfordfoundation.org.uk](mailto:roisin.heavey@salfordfoundation.org.uk).



Young people in Langworthy taking part in the National Citizen Service

## Staying warm and cost efficient over winter

**1) Close the curtains at night** – Curtains not only keep light out but keep heat in! As it starts to get dark earlier and the temperature drops, make the most of the early evenings and close your curtains.

**2) Wrap up!** – Before you reach for the radiator, try layering up to keep warm in your home. Wearing lots of thin layers traps heat better than one thick layer, and can be more effective (and cost efficient) than putting your heating on.

**3) Protect your pipes** – Keep your heating on low, even when you're out, to protect the pipes from freezing and report any dripping taps which could block the pipe if the temperature plummets.

**4) Help your radiator reach its full potential** – To ensure sure you're getting the most heat possible from your radiator, make sure it isn't being blocked by furniture. Putting tin foil behind your radiator can also prevent wasted heat.



### On your bike!

Our very own poverty and partnership coordinator, Sarah Riley has been testing out an eBike on her commute to work.

She has been documenting her experiences through a blog, which you can read on the Transport for Greater Manchester website.

If you're interested in trying something new while saving the environment and getting active, check out the TfGM's 'Just Ride' campaign.

## You've been checking, switching and saving!

'Check, switch and save' events have now taken place across Manchester, Salford, Knutsford and Sheffield. The events aim to help you keep safe and warm in winter, as well as offering advice on keeping your bills low.

A number of freebies were on offer at each event including lidded pans, thermal mugs and woolly hats. We also offered everyone who attended a chance to have their electric blankets and Christmas tree lights PAT tested to ensure they are safe to use in the run up to winter. Those that failed were swapped for newer, safer models free of charge!

More check, switch and save events will be confirmed soon so keep your eyes peeled for more information. For information on how switching your supplier could save you money this winter, contact us on 0300 123 1966.



# NEWS BOARD



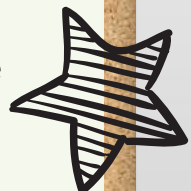
## Help us to help you!

Our members of staff are here to help everyone they meet. It is important that this respectful relationship is two-way.

We ask our customers to...

- Please show staff and other customers respect and courtesy
- Be reasonable and honest
- Work with us to help us help you

For more information, visit the customer code of conduct page on our website at [www.greatplaces.org.uk](http://www.greatplaces.org.uk).



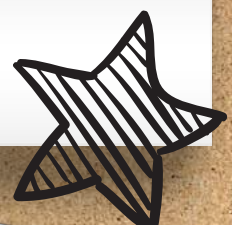
## New ways to win!

Do you have a question or need advice about any of the following?

- Finances, benefits and saving money
- Keeping your home eco friendly
- Repairs and DIY
- Health and wellbeing

Send us your questions for a chance to have them answered in the next My Great Place. Those featured will also win a £20 voucher!

Send your questions to [communications@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:communications@greatplaces.org.uk) with the subject line 'My Great Place advice'.



## STAY WELL THIS WINTER

### Stay well this winter!

The Stay Well This Winter campaign is a joint initiative from NHS England and Public Health England, to help people with long-term health conditions and those over 65 prepare for winter and ward off common winter illnesses.

Winter can be seriously bad for the health of these people, increasing the risk of blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. There are a number of things you can do to prepare against the cold weather:

- At the first sign of a cough or cold, get immediate advice from your pharmacist before it gets more serious
- Speak to your pharmacist about medicines you should have in stock over winter, and pick up any prescription medications before the Christmas holidays when many GPs will close
- It is important to keep warm in winter, so heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F)
- Make sure you get your flu jab – this is free for people aged 65 and over, people with certain long term health conditions, pregnant women and children aged two, three and four.

## Get snap happy!

To celebrate their 100 year anniversary, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is holding a photography competition.

If you're a budding photographer and have a shot you feel celebrates the value of housing, send it to us (along with a brief description) to [communications@greatplaces.org.uk](mailto:communications@greatplaces.org.uk). We'll send your entry to the CIH and could win one of three great prizes - good luck!



## Important reminder: benefit cap changes!

A reminder that the Government has put a limit on the amount of money that people can receive in benefits. The new rules mean that a family will get a maximum of £384 per week and a single person £257 per week.

If you're going to lose money through this new system, there are solutions available. In the short term you can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). This is a Government scheme to help people cope with the changes in the way housing benefit is paid. This is only a short term fix, but can give you some breathing space to make the changes you need to make.

Great Places also have dedicated teams available who can offer you the right advice and support for getting into work or assessing your finances to help you become smarter with your spending. Contact us at 0300 123 1966 for more information.

**New ways to win!**  
Have a question about your finances? Ask us and be in with a chance to win! Find out more on page 21!



## Be a savvy shopper this festive season!

With the festive season around the corner, many families choose to spread the cost by buying on credit cards, store credit, catalogues or using pay day loan companies or doorstep lenders. However, the interest rates on these options are incredibly high and you can often end up paying more than double what you originally borrowed.

As an alternative, you can get much better rates from companies offering affordable credit. These organisations are not for profit so they only collect a small rate of interest to cover their costs.

The cheapest option is a loan from a credit union, however Moneyline also offer lower cost loans with quick decisions but at a slightly higher interest rate. With affordable credit, you can make weekly repayments and the interest rates are much lower than the high street. It is designed for people with low credit ratings or who have had problems with debt in the past.

To find your nearest credit union visit [www.findyourcreditunion.co.uk/home](http://www.findyourcreditunion.co.uk/home). You can contact Moneyline directly on 0345 643 1553. Alternatively, you can contact us and ask to speak to your financial inclusion coordinator.



June and Marlene from Windmill House in Blackpool working hard at the bake sale

## Happy International Older People's Day!

Customers across Blackpool and Manchester got into the spirit for the UN's International Older People's Day, taking part in 1940s afternoon tea parties, bingo and craft competitions in celebration. The theme this year was 'Take a stand against ageism' and residents were encouraged to get creative celebrate the positives of age.

## Fundraising is a piece of cake!

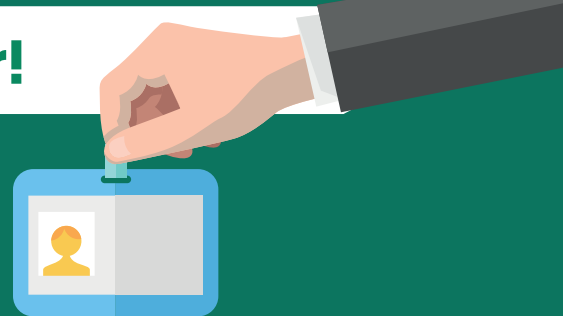
Congratulations to The Byrons, Windmill House and St George's Court who raised a whopping £1,200 for charity by holding coffee mornings for their fellow residents, neighbours and families. Plenty of cakes were sold (including some home baked treats) with all the money going towards Macmillan Cancer Care.



The Willows resident (and Older People's Day award winner) Kathleen Samuels celebrating with Great Places senior service delivery manager Emily Cole

## Be sure when you open the door!

Theft doesn't always involve breaking and entering. Some criminals use distraction or fraud to steal – usually from the most vulnerable. In order to prevent these incidents and protect yourself from fraudsters, please always follow these steps:



1) Treat anyone you don't know who comes to your door without an appointment as suspicious. Always ask for identification. Anyone visiting your home from Great Places will always carry ID and in most cases will arrive in a Great Places branded vehicle. If anyone claiming to be from Great Places comes to your door, you are entitled to ask for ID and should always do so.

2) If you are still unsure, call Great Places. Be sure to close the door and ask the caller to wait outside while you call, rather than inviting them in. Call 0300 123 1966 and we can confirm if you should be expecting a member of the Great Places team.

3) Never give cash upfront. Great Places will never ask for cash payments upfront in exchange for repairs and maintenance. If anyone does ask for money and claims to be from Great Places, ask the caller to leave and contact us using the number above.

4) If you live alone or feel you may be more vulnerable to fraudsters, arrange with a trusted neighbour or a member of your family who lives nearby to be your 'Nominated Neighbour'. This is someone you can call to help you confirm the identity of any person who calls at your door and accompany them into your home while they speak to you.

If you're looking for further guidance on preventing door-to-door fraud, the GMP website has plenty of useful information available at [www.gmp.police.uk](http://www.gmp.police.uk).

# Competition time

**New ways to win on page 21!**

Complete both competitions, along with the survey questions, cut them out and post them to us, along with your full name and address, to be entered into a prize draw to win a **£10** shopping voucher. Three winners will be selected. Make sure you include your survey questions with your entry.

**Send your entries by post to:** FREEPOST, RLSC-HLLJ-EZRZ, My Great Place, Maria Morris, Great Places Housing Group, Southern Gate, 729 Princess Road, Manchester, M20 2LT  
**All entries must be in by Friday 1 March 2017. Remember, you don't need a stamp!**

## Wordsearch

### Words to find are:

COMMUNITY	INSPIRATION	NEIGHBOUR
SPEECH	AWARD	CHAMPION
CELEBRATION	TROPHY	WINNERS
HERO	STAR	GOLD

### Congratulations to last issue's winners:

**Wordsearch:** Adele Mortimer – Salford  
 David Dunning – Salford  
 Anthony Hartley – Blackburn

**Spot the difference:** Thoraya Said – Blackburn  
 John David Rowland – Manchester  
 Sandra Roosevelt – Sheffield



## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

There are five differences – can you spot them? Circle the **five** differences on photo two.



Please answer the following questions and send them along with your competition entry in order to be entered into the prize draw.

**Do you own a smart phone or tablet? Yes / No**

**What software does your phone or tablet use? Android / iOS (Apple) / Windows / I don't know**

**Would you be interested in testing or downloading the Great Places app to your device? Yes / No**

Name:.....  
 Address: .....  
 Telephone/Mobile: .....Email: .....