

Winter 2017

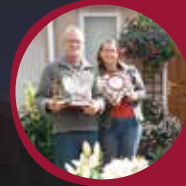
mv great place



The elephant in the room at Thorncross!



Eileen braves the shave for Macmillan!



Prizes galore for the Browns in Blackpool!

Apprentice superstar!

Customer Richard proves that age is just a number

great places
HOUSING GROUP

Get in touch

Email us:
@ cat@greatplaces.org.uk
Or email us about a repair at:
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

Office addresses

Blackburn office

Barnfield House (Suite 4 and 5)
Groundfloor, Accrington Road
Blackburn BB1 3NY

Fylde office

336 Talbot Road, Blackpool,
FY1 3QU

Oldham office

119 Union Street,
Oldham OL1 1TE

Cheshire office

106 Longridge, Knutsford, WA16 8PD

Great Places head office

2A Derwent Avenue,
Manchester M21 7QP

Sheffield office

The Quadrant, 99 Parkway Avenue,
Sheffield S59 4WG

Our opening times over the festive season:

22 December Open 8am–6pm

23–24 December (Weekend) Closed

25 December (Christmas Day) Closed

26 December (Boxing Day) Closed

27–29 December Open 8am–6pm

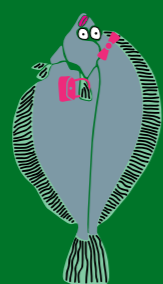
30 December Closed

31 December (New Year's Eve) Closed

1 January (New Year's Day) Closed

Struggling to read My Great Place? Let us know and we'll send you a magnifying sheet! An audio version of My Great Place is also available. Contact us using the details below.

Kids' Competition



Margaret Plaice, our little fishy friend, is 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!

Entrants must be 16 or under and Great Places residents.

Entries must be received by 2 February 2018.

Last issue's winner: Tasnia Bokth (aged 11), from Longsight. Thanks for the lovely letter Tasnia!

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

Great Places
2A Derwent Avenue
Manchester M20 2LT
Email:
communications@greatplaces.org.uk

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

Tweet us @MyGreatPlace

Cover star:
Richard Wilson
from Weaste



FSC AND WORLD LAND TRUST LOG-OS



Welcome to
my great place



Welcome to the winter issue of My Great Place! This edition is a Customer Annual Report special, where we share everything you need to know about our performance over the last year. As usual, we asked our customers to get involved in the design of this report, and we got some great feedback – a huge thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts with us!

This issue's cover star has a fantastic story. Richard isn't your average apprentice – on page 6 you can learn about his career journey, and how Great Places gave him a helping hand to overcome the obstacles that were holding him back.

With Christmas just around the corner and the weather getting colder, we're all trying to save money, whether that's cutting our energy bills or saving for Christmas. We've got plenty of tips, support and advice which you can find on the Newsboard on page 18 and on the Ask the Experts pages (pages 16–17).

This issue also celebrates the official launch of next year's Community Star Awards. This is a fantastic event that celebrates unsung heroes, from selfless neighbours to inspiring community groups. Want to thank someone in your neighbourhood? Find out how on page 4.

I hope you all have a fantastic festive season, however you're spending it. If you need us, our opening hours are on page 2, but don't forget, our customer portal is always available. More information can be found below.

Adele
Adele Wilkinson, Editor



What's inside?

Community Stars	4–5
Cover story	6
My Money: Universal Credit edition	7
Customer Annual Report	8–13
Neighbourhood News	14–15
Ask the Experts	16–17
Newsboard	18–19
Competition time	20

Register today!

Our great new website is now live! From paying your rent and viewing your balance to reporting a repair and getting money advice, we've made it easier for you to manage your home and tenancy with just a few quick clicks... anytime, anywhere.

Just click the big blue 'resident login' button to get started! All you'll need is an email address and your tenancy reference number. If you don't have this, don't worry! You can use our webchat function and a member of the Great Places team will be able to find it for you.



Nominate your local hero for a Community Star!

p4

UC Universal Credit

My Money: the Universal Credit special!

p7



DIY tricks for keeping your home warm in winter

p16

COMMUNITY STARS AWARDS

Don't forget -
nominations
close 28
February 2018

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 a Great Places Community Stars Award!

All Great Places residents can nominate an individual, group or project that they think has shone over the last 12 months. We want to hear about the people who make our communities great!

The closing date is 28 February 2018, so get in touch to nominate your community star!

We'll be holding a special awards ceremony in June 2018 to celebrate the hard work that residents and community groups put in to make their community a better place. Look out for further information in future issues.

You can nominate someone in any of the following ways:

Online: www.greatplaces.org.uk (click the banner on the homepage!)

Email: involvement.team@greatplaces.org.uk

Phone: 0161 447 5076

Post: Maria Morris, FREEPOST RTYJ-EATU-CCGX, Great Places Housing Group, 2A Derwent Avenue, Manchester, M21 7QP.

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 difference to where they live. Maybe they've helped to improve your building, set up social events to bring the community together, or raised money to transform green space.

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.

Independence and Wellbeing 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.

Independence and Wellbeing 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.

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?

Volunteer Award A person who volunteers and makes a difference outside of their immediate community – a person who gives their time generously to improve the lives of others.



Apprentice superstar!

Richard Wilson isn't your average apprentice. At 59 years old, the Myrtle Leaf Grove customer had over 20 years experience as a joiner, yet a few years ago found himself struggling to get work.

In a changing job market, where more employers require formal qualifications and digital know-how, Richard was being held back. As he struggled with unemployment, he was limited in the opportunities he could take as he was unable to afford travel, and eventually faced the possibility of homelessness as he was unable to pay his rent.

This is where Great Places stepped in. Employment and Skills Manager Nicolette Aydin secured Richard work experience on our Union Road, Bolton site with Crudens Construction, who were impressed by Richard's skill and professionalism. They wanted to work with him again, so Nicolette introduced him to the Shared Apprenticeship Scheme through the Chamber of Commerce, where he was able to complete an NVQ qualification while he worked with Crudens.

Richard said: "The biggest challenge was my low income. I found that it was beneficial to have my own tools on site, so I invested in my own kit which was costly. Driving to the site was also expensive and hard to juggle with other outgoings. But Great Places helped me with travel costs and evaluated my finances to make sure I could afford everything.

"Another challenge was the computer. I needed to do my maths test online as part of the course, but using a computer is a barrier for me. Luckily throughout my apprenticeship, people kindly volunteered to help me learn, and Great Places eventually helped me find a way to complete the test on paper, which made me feel much more comfortable!"

Through his apprenticeship, Richard worked across a variety of schemes in the North West with a number of different housing associations, impressing project managers at every site with his experience and ability. So much so that when Kier Living began construction on Great Places' Radcliffe Civic scheme last year they asked if Richard was available by name. With help from Social Value Coordinator Lisa Uzudimma, he secured the position and was finally able to finish his NVQ with Great Places.

Mick Dunn from Kier said: "Richard's done really well with us. Knowing his age, we did wonder what he was doing being an apprentice. However after working with him, I get it – he still has a significant number of years left to work and he clearly has the desire and passion to do this. He is enthusiastic, always on time, willing to do more... I'm very proud of how far he has come!"

Lisa said: "Continuing the work with Richard over the last year signifies both his commitment and desire to work. It has been a pleasure to assist with his final stages of his NVQ Level 2!"

Earlier this year, Richard's hard work was recognised when he was shortlisted for the Greater Manchester Apprentice of the Year award.

"The apprenticeship has been a great experience – I have learned so much and thoroughly enjoyed it. It has been hard on occasions, however being nominated as a finalist for Apprentice of the Year across all of Greater Manchester was just the icing on the cake. The way I see it, no pain no gain. The recognition really meant a lot.

"I will be forever in debt to Great Places for all the help they have given me. I have now finished my NVQ and look forward to rebuilding my career with this qualification under my belt!"

my money Universal Credit edition!

Over the next 12 months all Job Centres in England will start accepting Universal Credit claims under the Full Digital service.

If you claim under the Digital service you will need to set up an online account and you will need an email address and mobile phone number. You'll also need to get your identity verified and will be given login details to access your UC account.



You'll be expected to report all changes in circumstances online and check regularly for messages from your work coach. Make sure you take any action you are asked – otherwise you could be sanctioned. You can use your journal to ask questions about your claim.



Richard's Universal Credit success story!

Employment and Skills Manager, Nicolette Aydin, said: "Before we explored the apprenticeship as an option for Richard, we had to ensure that he could live and meet his financial commitments on an apprentice salary, so our specialist team completed a full benefit calculation.

"Due to Richard being on Universal Credit, it worked out that he would be £70 better off each week while doing his apprenticeship – so it was a no brainer and we went full steam ahead in getting him placed.

"Usually, people assume they can't manage on a apprenticeship wage but Universal Credit actually worked in Richard's favour and meant that he was able to pursue his dreams without breaking the bank!"

Universal Credit can be paid into a:

- Current account
- Basic bank account
- Credit Union account
- "Jam Jar" account
- Post Office card account
- Prepaid card account

Under Full Digital UC service, payments to a Post Office card account or a Prepaid card account will only apply if you cannot open a bank account.

Existing Universal Credit Claimants

What happens to people already receiving Universal Credit when a Job Centre starts accepting Full Service claims?

Existing claimants will start being moved onto Full Service a couple of months after it is introduced at your Job Centre. Speak to your Job Centre if you have any questions about this.

Got a query about Universal Credit? We're here to help!

Please contact us on 0300 123 1966 or visit our website: www.greatplaces.org.uk

Your Customer Annual Report 2017



Matthew Harrison
Chief Executive

Welcome to your 2017 Customer Annual Report. This year, we have once again worked with groups of customers to produce a report packed full of information that is useful, easy-to-understand and focussed on what matters to you.

It's been another strong year for Great Places in delivering on our vision; maximising our investment in sustainable homes, building successful vibrant communities and providing outstanding customer service and support.

I know that how we invest in our homes is important to our customers, so as usual we have included plenty of information on repairs, maintenance and safety. We are proud to have achieved 100% compliance in all areas of safety this year to ensure your home is as safe as possible, especially in light of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

Making the best use of new technology has been a key priority for us over the last year. Our corporate annual report was digital only, and we have condensed this one down to just six pages. We have also invested a lot of resources into our brand new website, which is now full of information for you to browse, including a number of brilliant case studies which are highlighted in this report.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to shape this report, and who continue to make our magazines insightful, interesting reads. Our customers' drive to get involved in shaping our services is always inspiring and I look forward to seeing a selection of your hard work recognised at the Community Stars Awards next year.

I hope you enjoy reading this year's report and have a fantastic New Year!

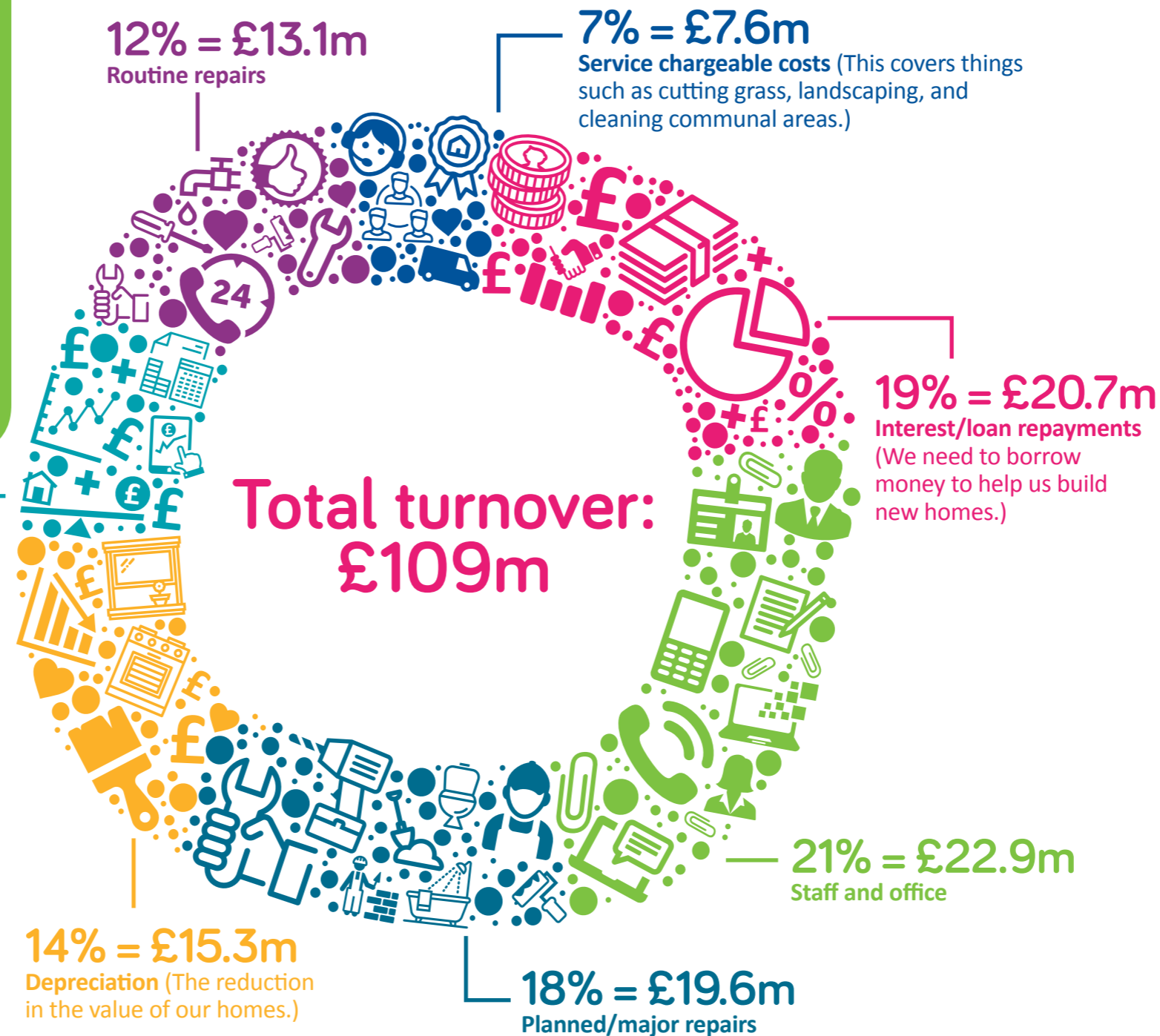
Our values

- We are fair, open and accountable
- We know, respect and care about our customers
- We appreciate the effort of everyone who works here
- We promote partnerships, efficiency and value for money
- We passionately embrace creativity, change and innovation

1. Finances

Profit for Purpose

As a 'profit for purpose' organisation, we aim to maximise our surplus to enable us to deliver our key priorities and realise our vision of **Great Homes, Great Communities, Great People**. We've created a visual document to explain how we make the most of our surplus and how we invest it back into our communities. You can view it on our website, www.greatplaces.org.uk.



Record breaking performances!



22 days

Average re-let time
(Improved for four years running!)



2.6% arrears

(We collected more money this year than last year despite the rent cut!)



£350,000
saved by re-letting homes quickly

2. Great Homes

Great homes are our bread and butter, and this year saw us build **625** new quality affordable homes across **14 local authority areas**, as well as investing **£14.4m** in existing homes.

We were also delighted to receive further funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to develop another **872 new properties** through Great Places' home ownership specialist company, Plumlife.



92.3%
satisfaction
with repairs



85%
repairs completed
on first visit



10 days
average time to
complete a repair

£32m
spent on repairs,
maintenance and
investment



The introduction of our repairs materials distribution centre continues to pay off, delivering an annual saving of **£150k!**

**Over
64,000
customers!**



19,000+
homes in our
portfolio



£87.3m
invested into
building new homes



97.3%
satisfaction with
our new homes

Keeping your home safe!

Your safety is our number one priority. In the last year we achieved the following:

- **100%** properties checked for gas safety
- **100%** communal areas with in-date fire risk assessments
- Fire risk assessments carried out on **100%** of our high-rise properties, providing reassurance following the Grenfell Tower fire
- Maintenance checks on **100%** of elevators
- **100%** homes tested for electrical safety certificates
- **100%** of water safety checks completed
- **100%** of asbestos inspections completed



How do we manage the allocation of repairs jobs?

Jobs are allocated based on customer need, urgency and the availability of resources. Emergency jobs are attended within **four hours** and non-emergencies within **28 days** at a time convenient for the customer. Improvement works are planned using a database which records the condition of each Great Places home. This information is kept up-to-date by our stock condition surveyors who complete over **2,000 property reviews each year!**



3. Great Communities

Great Places' vision isn't just to build great homes, but to create thriving communities. We pride ourselves on being more than just a landlord and invest as much as we can into transforming the lives of our customers.

Our Social Investment Team continue to make a real difference to people's lives, and in the last year have helped nearly **200 customers** find jobs, as well as supporting **180 customers** into voluntary placements. We've also given information, advice and guidance to over **1000 people**.

463
customers helped
into training

78.4%
satisfaction with
the handling of
ASB cases

£2.3m
passed on to
customers

Saving you money!

Over the last year we helped our customers save **£2.3 million** through benefit advice, utility savings and affordable credit.

We provided support to customers struggling with Universal Credit, and joined up 14 other housing associations nationwide to conduct further research into how Universal Credit affects residents across Greater Manchester through the Sharing the Credit project.

We've also continued to help hundreds of customers cut down their bills through our home energy visits and 'check, switch and save' events, saving residents **£33,000** on fuel last year!



Fallon's story

From a kayaking and outdoor pursuits instructor to a leathercraft specialist, with help from our Residents' Fund and Employment and Skills Team, Fallon started her dream business. Read her story at www.greatplaces.org.uk.

160
Community Stars
nominations
received



Tackling anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) remains an important priority for us and this year we achieved a **78.4%** satisfaction rate with our handling of ASB cases. We continue to invest in preventative measures and long-term solutions to ensure your communities remain great, safe places to live.

This year we were delighted to be commended by the Morecambe police force for resolving a spate of youth-related ASB incidents. You can read the full story at www.greatplaces.org.uk.



4. Great People

We believe it's the people that make our neighbourhoods special, which is why we try to include you in our decision-making as much as possible. From mystery shopping and call audits to scrutiny reviews, every year we use customer experiences to help us improve, and allow our people to deliver the best service they can.

1,621 customers were involved in shaping our services this year!

£86k worth of projects funded this year

Residents' Fund

The Great Places Residents' Fund is a pot of money to support employment opportunities or community projects. Funding is decided by Great Places customers, via our Customer Funding Panel to ensure we remain open and accountable. To read about funding recipients, VOICE Sunday Family Club, visit www.greatplaces.org.uk.



Who are Insight?

Insight are a group of customers who volunteer their time to scrutinise our services – this involves collecting feedback from other customers, interviewing staff and assessing which areas could use improvement.

Insight not only offers customers the chance to learn new skills, it also keeps us 'fair, open and accountable' and gives us a true picture of ways we can continue to improve.

Insight's latest update

Insight completed **four** service reviews last year and have now started their next review around 'customer communication and repairs'. The group have so far interviewed key members of the Repairs Team, listened to incoming calls to our Customer Service Officers, and surveyed customers about the services they have received.

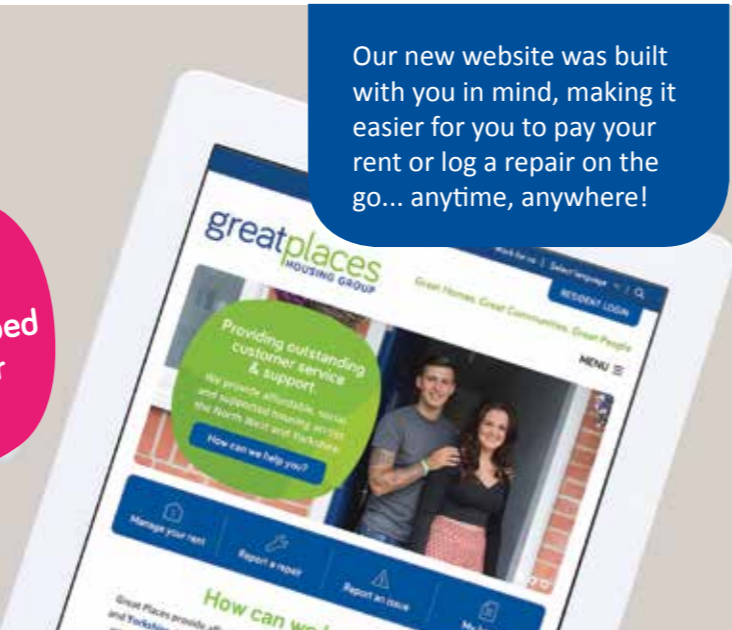
Suggested areas of improvement will be taken to the Board in December. To read the full list of recommendations, visit www.greatplaces.org.uk.

420 calls audited by customers

86.1% satisfaction with Great Places

128 repairs call-outs audited

900 customers helped us shape our website



Our new website was built with you in mind, making it easier for you to pay your rent or log a repair on the go... anytime, anywhere!

Interested?

Insight is always looking for new members who can help with scrutiny. So if you want to get your voice heard and you feel you have skills you can offer, contact us on **0161 447 5020** or email Involvement.Team@greatplaces.org.uk.

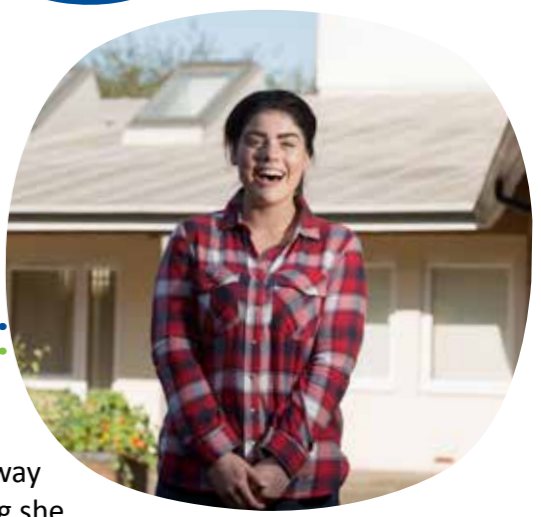
5. Independence and Wellbeing

Our business change journey, Building Greatness, has seen us rebrand our Supported Housing service as 'Independence and Wellbeing'. This better reflects the service we provide, and the goals of our supported schemes, which are committed to helping our customers develop key life skills and achieve their goals.

2,579 people supported

Which needs do we support?

- Homelessness
- Young parents
- Mental health issues
- Addiction
- Older people



Shannon's story

Shannon's mum passed away when she was 18, meaning she had a lot to deal with emotionally, as well as becoming suddenly independent. With accommodation and support from Bluebell Court, Shannon is now working towards a career in the Police as well as completing a social care course. Read more at www.greatplaces.org.uk.

How do we help our customers reach their goals?

When a new customer moves into one of our supported housing schemes or receives a support package, we work with them to identify their goals and strengths and help them to develop a plan. We can do this in a number of ways including:

- Providing high quality accommodation, including specialist accommodation for those with additional needs.
- Support, with a focus on promoting and maintaining independence and wellbeing.
- Working with other agencies, allowing us to provide holistic support.
- Partnerships with voluntary and statutory organisations to provide innovative services.

Getting you online!

We understand that not all of our residents have the time to complete face-to-face training, which is why this year we introduced a new range of e-learning courses. Parents at Sarah Lodge were the first to try it out, completing their choice of accredited courses at a pace that suited them. We plan to roll out e-learning across more of our schemes over the next year.

1,600 customers who maximised their income

450 customers who progressed with training



994 customers completed a planned 'move on'



A total of **eight** MPs visited our Independence and Wellbeing schemes to champion supported housing during the General Election!



Customers get spooky at Buile Hill Park

Buile Hill Park's Halloween Spooktakular!

Great Places got spooky on Friday 13 October, teaming up with the Salford Community Leisure Centre to hold a 'Spooktakular' Halloween event for families in Salford. The infamous Great Places smoothie bike made an appearance, along with fairground rides, crafts and a witchy walk – a fun-filled event for all the family!

The elephant in the room at Thorncross...

The Thorncross tenants group Lottery-funded garden has an unusual resident that visitors will be unlikely to forget! The Fylde garden's latest purchases include a solar power water fountain and an ornamental elephant – both of which will be brought out once the weather warms up in Spring. What an elephantastic addition!



Life through a lens at Park Hill

A resident from Park Hill, Sheffield came up with an eye-catching idea to bring her neighbours together.

Kate Golby organised a photography competition with help from Great Places and Urban Splash to encourage other residents to unleash their creative side and generate community spirit. She received over 60 fantastic entries, which illustrate life at Park Hill, including the photo above, submitted by Angus Hill who took home first prize for his striking collage of the development!



Winnipeg garden complete!

Winnipeg Residents Association in Blackpool recently benefited from a grant by Great Places Residents' Fund to renovate their Community Memorial Garden. The pond had sprung a leak and was almost empty, the fencing had been damaged by vandals, and the gate was stiff and hard to open.

Thanks to the funding the group received, the pond has been restored, new safer fencing has been installed and a new gate has been put on for ease of access, meaning the garden is now once again a safe, secure place for residents to sit, chat, relax and watch the local wildlife.



The Secret Garden of Springfields keeps on blooming!

The Secret Garden of Springfields in Knutsford has had a 'blooming' good 2016! After a year of outstanding achievements, many of which you can read about in previous issues of My Great Place, the group rounded off the year with a bang, taking home a Community Impact Award from the National Institute of Housing! The local community have continued to contribute to the garden, which now hosts bug hotels, bird boxes, and even a chicken coop! Congratulations to the Secret Garden Group on an incredibly successful year!

GRAPEVINE

Coming together to get lost in music

In conjunction with Salford University and Castlefield Gallery, Great Places held an event to celebrate age through arts and culture. The project was aimed at customers who lived in the Salford area during the mid 1950s–1960s. We wanted to talk to those who were teenagers during this time, to find out how chart music influenced their lives when they were young. Castlefield Gallery will be creating a film on the same theme next year, hopefully with some of those who took part starring in the film!

We are still looking for more people in the Salford area to be involved, so if you have stories to tell from this era, contact Lisa on 07917 527 300.



Eileen braves the shave!

The Byrons took part in Macmillan's annual Coffee Morning, raising £230 while enjoying a delicious selection of baked treats. However the star of the show was customer Eileen Porter who raised over £100 for the cancer support charity by shaving her hair – a fantastic achievement for a great cause!



Lilian goes stateside!

Lilian Makin has been a resident at The Willows for over 21 years and an avid member of our community. Lilian strives for positive change in all that she does. She was key in acquiring funds during The Willows' lottery bid and has participated in countless projects at the scheme throughout the years.

Lilian will soon be emigrating to America to live with her family so her friends at The Willows held a Stars and Stripes leaving do for her! There were plenty of gifts, speeches and of course... apple pie!



Ask the experts!

Money



Ask Josh

I need a bit of help this year to make Christmas special for my family. I need to take out a loan. Where can I get the best deal without being ripped off by dodgy lenders?

Lisa, Blackburn

Dear Lisa,

The cheapest option when taking out a loan is always to go through your local credit union. If you don't know how to get in touch with them, you can always go through us!

We offer small value loans of up to £300 through credit unions at low interest rates, which you can pay back on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. You don't have to be in work or have a good credit rating to apply and we will even gift you £50 into your Credit Union account once the loan is repaid!

A recent Government commissioned study found that credit unions offer the best value to consumers on loans, and even the most expensive credit union loan in Britain is still eight times cheaper than a payday loan charged at their cap!

Credit unions also offer savings accounts with fantastic interest rates if you want to get a head start on next Christmas! To find your nearest credit union, visit: www.findyourcreditunion.co.uk or contact us using the details on page 2.

DIY



Ask Ruby

Are there any cheap and easy DIYs I can do around the house to keep my heating costs low?

Syed, Manchester

Dear Syed,

Did you know on average over 70% of household energy consumption is spent on heating your home? We all want to reduce our energy bills and luckily there are plenty of tricks to do so!

Firstly, there are some simple ways of reusing heat that's already there. For example, if you're cooking with the oven, leave the door open when you've finished so the heat spreads through your home rather than going to waste. Just be sure it's turned off first! Similarly, after a bath, leave the water in the tub until it goes cold, rather than flushing that heat down the pipes. However, this should be avoided if you have a problem with mildew or mould.

Got a compass? Make sure the curtains on the south and west sides of your home are kept open during the day to trap the heat from the low winter sun. Once the sun has set, close the curtains to retain that heat.

There's also a few DIYs you can do using materials you probably already have around your house. Putting tin foil down the back of your radiator can make a real difference to its efficiency as it reflects the heat rather than letting it be absorbed by the wall. You can also line your windows with cling film or bubble wrap, or try a homemade draught excluder by stuffing a pair of old tights!

Finally, turning down your thermostat just one degree could cut down your bills by 10%!

Health & wellbeing



Ask Kirsty

I struggle with anxiety and stress. I try to keep busy and organised but from time to time I get myself all worked up. And with winter coming I'll find it harder to be motivated, any ideas about what I could do?

Amy, Morecambe

Dear Amy,

Many people living with mental health issues find that they worsen during winter, as the days get shorter and we all spend less time outside in the sun – you're not alone in this.

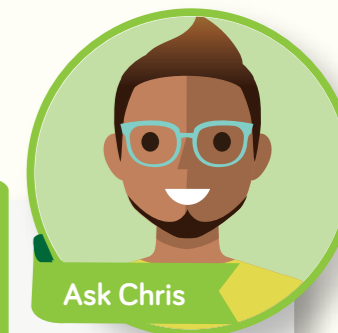
There are some simple things that mental health professionals advise you do during winter to boost your serotonin levels and release endorphins (two of your body's 'happy hormones'). Making the most of the daylight and getting out to do some exercise – even just a half hour walk in your lunch break – can prevent you from feeling like you've wasted the day, and also naturally lifts your mood. A healthy diet is also important to maintain, particularly plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Some people find that taking extra vitamin B12 or a Vitamin D supplement is also helpful in winter.

Finding the balance between working and relaxing during dark evenings can be tricky – why not divide your evenings into busy time and relaxing time? This will give you deadlines to get things done, and also ensure you give yourself time to relax. Remember, that's just as important for your mental health!

If you find that your mood significantly dips in winter, you may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (or SAD). You can read more about symptoms of SAD and treatment at www.mind.co.uk, but if these symptoms are starting to have a significant impact on your day-to-day life, speak to your GP.

Send us your question and if the experts answer it, you'll win £20 in high street vouchers! Email your questions to communications@greatplaces.org.uk or write to us using the address on page 2!

Go green!



Ask Chris

How do I get rid of weeds on my front driveway? I dig them up from in between the paving slabs but two weeks later they are back! I have tried pouring boiling water over and also salt. Any tips from keeping them at bay?

Gail, Timperley

Dear Gail,

I wish I could give you better news of how to eradicate them for good. But as with everything in nature, the weed will be constantly moving and growing so it's an endless cycle trying to keep them at bay. Unfortunately pulling them out will only remove the top of the plant, and if the root is still there under the slabs, they will continue to return within a few weeks.

There are a couple of options for more effective weed control though, ranging in cost.

Firstly you could re-mortar or re-sand the gaps between the slabs. This will improve the overall look of the driveway and will give the root system less space to spread to.

The most cost effective and long lasting option is to purchase a weed killer. A residual weed killer will kill the weeds and act as a barrier for approximately three months to prevent re-growth. These are widely available at a reasonable price from stores such as Home Bargains, Aldi or B&Q.

Finally, if you want to take a DIY approach, some people report that a mix of vinegar, salt and washing up liquid has the same effect with fewer chemicals.

Good luck!

Send us a question and win £20!

NEWS BOARD

Allpay systems outage

In September, we experienced issues with Allpay which caused some customers' Direct Debit rent payments to be duplicated. This has now been resolved and repayments have been made to those affected. We would like to apologise for the inconvenience this will have caused. We have received a full incident report from Allpay which states that all causes have been corrected, and it is highly unlikely than an incident of this nature would be able to happen again. Many thanks for your understanding during the incident. If there is still a query on your account we will contact you to discuss payment.



Prizes galore for the Browns!

Congratulations to Ian and Ria Brown from Mickledon Road in Blackpool who won several prizes in the Mereside Gardening Competition in Blackpool. The pair took home 2nd prize in 'tubs and window boxes', 1st prize in 'hanging baskets', 1st prize in 'formal garden', overall winner in 'hanging baskets' and overall winner in 'all aspects gardening'!

Ian handmade all the planters and hanging baskets in their garden along with the couple's shed and decking area from recycled wood. Congratulations!



Could you get a free flu jab?

Did you know the flu jab is free to people who are most at risk of complications from flu, including people aged 65 and over, those with long term conditions, pregnant women and children aged two and three? It's free because you need it—so contact your GP if you qualify.

Get skilled up in Bolton and Bury!

We've been working with Bolton at Home to provide employment and skills opportunities for customers in Bolton and Bury. We're offering a number of courses to help you back into work, including IT, CV writing and debt and money advice, as well as hobby clubs such as crafting, cooking, DIY and First Aid.

These are available at a number of centres across Bolton and Bury including Tonge Moor, Brightmet, Johnson Fold and Deane. To find out more about what's going on at your local centre, contact Great Places Information and Advice Officer, Callie on 07929 651 260.

Could we save you money on your water bill?

We're always on the lookout for ways to help you save. Which is why we're continuing to work with United Utilities, who offer affordable bills, debt payment matching and restart grants for those who are struggling to afford their water bills. Their team are specifically trained to handle sensitive issues, so give them a call on 0800 072 6765.



Ready to Raise?

Raise is a careers information, advice and guidance service in Greater Manchester. They provide personalised, intensive support to priority groups – including customers with mental health needs, income support claimants with young children, women over 19 interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and the over 50s – to help them achieve their learning and development goals.

Interested? Contact
tracey.harmer@theworkcompany.co.uk
or
stacey.burgess@theworkcompany.co.uk.

We're looking for customers in Lancashire to join our exciting new project!

Do you need support finding employment? Do you want to complete training in a new area? Would you benefit from volunteering or helping with community projects or need a confidence boost? We can help support you to achieve your goals through the More Positive Together Programme!

This new exciting project will run until December 2019 and will provide participants with one to one support through their tailored journey of mentoring, physical activity sessions, training courses, employment advice or work experience opportunities – all designed to boost confidence, improve wellbeing and increase employment prospects.

Keira Burns who is leading the project for Great Places said: "We are very excited to be delivering this programme and look forward to seeing the positive impact it has for our Lancashire customers. We would encourage anyone who thinks they could benefit from this programme to contact us."

If you would like more information or to register for the programme please contact us on tenant.referrals@greatplaces.org.uk quoting 'MPT' or contact us using the details on page 2.

Are you receiving your Winter Fuel Payment?

If you were born on or before 5 August 1953 you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. This is known as a 'Winter Fuel Payment'.

You usually get a Winter Fuel Payment automatically if you're eligible and you get the State Pension or another social security benefit (not Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit). You should get your money by 15 January 2018.

If the money isn't paid into your account by then, call the office that pays your benefits – their details are on any letters they sent you – to make a claim.

If you have any questions and would like to speak to our financial inclusion team, contact using the details on page 2.

Did you know...?

Our new website has a webchat function, available between 8am–6pm Monday to Friday. You can use this to talk to us directly without needing to pick up the phone – just enter your name and email address to get started!

Did you know...?

Following recent flooding in Lancaster, a reminder to all customers of the importance of investing in home and contents insurance.

Great Places provides cheap home insurance cover for as little as £2 per week via a range of payment options. You can:

- Make an annual payment by cheque
- Pay monthly, fortnightly or weekly using Direct Debit or swipe card.

Contact us for more information or download the application pack.

Competition time

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, RTYJ-EATU-CCGX, My Great Place, Maria Morris, Great Places Housing Group, 2A Derwent Avenue, Manchester M21 7QP. **All entries must be in by 2 February 2018. Remember, you don't need a stamp!**

Congratulations to last issue's winners:

Mr John Nixon – Blackburn

Mrs L Hall – Salford

Joanna Crump – Sheffield

Wordsearch

Words to find are:

GARDEN

AWARDS

NEIGHBOURS

CUSTOMER

SAVINGS

TROPHY

WINNER

CHRISTMAS

SNOW

APPRENTICE

FESTIVE

CREDIT

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

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 know someone who you think deserves a Community Stars Award? Yes / No

Are you happy for us to contact you about this person? If so, please write a phone number or email address below:

.....

Name:

Address:

Telephone/Mobile:Email: