

# TownTalk

News and updates for Catalyst's leaseholders

- Service charges
- Your rent
- Staircasing

## Welcome

Welcome to the February 2012 issue of *Town Talk*.

You will notice that this edition of *Town Talk* is shorter. Leaseholders told us that they wanted the same information as tenants, so we're now sending all our residents *Catalyst 4 You*, our quarterly customer magazine.

This issue includes information about your service charges – why you pay them and how the money is spent (page 2). We also explain how you can buy more shares in your home until you own it outright (page 4), and what to do if you want to move home (page 3).

If you have any comments or suggestions about articles for *Town Talk*, please do contact us via our website.

Best wishes,  
Steve Chapman, *Editor*



## Gas can kill

Faulty gas fires, boilers and cookers can be deadly. They can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning. If you own or part own your home, it's your responsibility to make sure your gas appliances are safe. So please get them checked annually.

### What is a gas safety check?

A gas safety check takes about 40 minutes and involves a Gas Safe registered engineer inspecting your gas appliances. A gas safety check involves:

- Checking all gas appliances to make sure they are burning and operating correctly
- Testing any gas flues (pipes that take fumes outside) to make sure they are working properly
- Checking that all safety devices are working

### Win a FREE gas check

Email us at: [homeownershipservices@chg.org.uk](mailto:homeownershipservices@chg.org.uk) saying that you would like a free gas safety check. The names of all leaseholders who contact us by 31 March will be put into a hat. The first three names to be drawn at random will win a free check.

Don't worry if you don't win. Our home ownership team will contact everyone who has entered the competition to tell you how you can get a discounted gas check from our contractors.



Catalyst  
Housing

## Why must I pay a service charge?

Nobody wants to pay for something unless they have to and this is true of service charges. But they are necessary to cover the costs of services which affect more than one dwelling. Typically this applies to flats, but it's also relevant to houses on private estates where there are paths, grass areas and trees to look after.

As your landlord Catalyst is responsible for providing these communal services and we then pass the costs onto our residents. Managing these services centrally makes sure that the system works properly and that there is a single responsibility. This arrangement is covered by the terms of your lease.

When we look after a building we will usually need to provide common services such as building insurance, cleaning, lighting and gardening. Depending on the nature of a building there may be other things that we must provide and maintain, such as lifts.



Inevitably, there are one off costs that will also arise, including repairs and the removal of bulk rubbish. For future maintenance needs most flats will have a reserve fund towards the cost of external decorations. There will be provision for other reserve funds for any units built after 2005.

We will send you a summary of service charge estimates in September each year, which will relate to the following financial year. If we need to adjust the estimated and actual expenditure, we will include this in the next service charge estimate.

For more details on your service charges, please contact us (contact details on page 4).

## Want to move home?

There may be a time when you will want to move home – for a job, to be nearer to family or to be in a home that better suits your needs.

### Transferring shares

You cannot transfer shares from one shared ownership home to another. You will need to sell your existing home and then re-register with your local authority to buy a different shared ownership property.

**More information:** If you are interested in selling your home, please call **0845 601 7729** or email **homebuy@chg.org.uk**

### Selling your home

If you want to sell your home, please contact us so our sales team can help. They'll ask you to:

- get your home valued by a qualified chartered surveyor
- fill in a instruction to sell form, which will include details of your property

We can then start advertising your home for you. If we can't find you a buyer within eight weeks, you're free to sell your home on the open market.

# Your rent

Our shared ownership leaseholders pay rent on the portion of the property they don't own. Rent is based on a specified percentage above the Retail Price Index (one of the official measures of inflation), plus an additional sum. The details of this are in your lease. We review our rents each year and from April 2012 your rent will change.

It's important you pay your rent and service charge on time, so you don't go into arrears. If you are struggling to pay your rent, please let us know. We will then work with you so you don't end up losing your home.



If you are in any financial difficulty read our useful tips:

- Check that you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to such as housing benefit. It is usually not possible to backdate claims, so don't delay claiming
- Pay your essential bills first such as your mortgage, rent and service charges. Otherwise you may end up losing your home
- Tell your mortgage lender if you are in financial difficulty – most lenders will want to help
- If you need to borrow money, call the Consumer Credit Public Register on **020 7211 8608** to make sure that the lender is legitimate. If you're still unsure about licensed lenders, contact Consumer Direct on **0845 404 0506** or visit [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk)

**Tell your mortgage lender if you are in financial difficulty – most lenders will want to help**

## Free financial advice

We work with independent agencies to offer leaseholders free money advice:

Agency	Where	When	Make an appointment
Citizens Advice Bureau	Ealing Gateway 26 – 30 Uxbridge Road London W5 2AU	Every Monday and Wednesday, from 9.30am to 3.30pm	Call 0300 456 2099
Citizens Advice Bureau	223 Church Road London NW10 9EP	Every Thursday, from 9am to 4pm	Call 0300 456 2099
The Agnes Smith Advice Centre	The Farmhouse Nightingale Avenue Oxford OX4 7BU	Every Tuesday and Thursday, from 10am to 12 noon	Drop in

## What is staircasing?



## Contact us



### By phone

London customers:  
0300 456 2099

South East customers:  
0300 456 2090



### By email / online

Via our website at  
[www.chg.org.uk](http://www.chg.org.uk)



### By post

London customers:  
Ealing Gateway  
26–30 Uxbridge Road  
London W5 2AU

South East customers:  
The Farmhouse  
Nightingale Avenue  
Oxford OX4 7BU



**Catalyst  
Housing**

*A charitable housing association*

Staircasing is a way of buying additional shares in your home. It's like walking up a set of stairs and taking a number of steps towards owning your property outright.

If you've been living in your home for more than a year you may want to buy more shares in your property. You can buy extra shares, up to at least 10% of your initial holding, at any one time. As you buy more shares your rent will be reduced until you own 100% of your home.

If you're interested in staircasing, the simple process can take just eight weeks to complete.

First, you should contact us and we will send you an information pack. You will then need to get your home valued by a qualified chartered surveyor. The pack we send you will contain a list of surveyors who may offer their services at a lower price. You will have to pay for the valuation, which is valid for three months from the survey date.

Please remember to tell your surveyor about any improvements you've made to your home as this may increase its value. Your lease explains more about home improvements.

You should also instruct a solicitor to act on your behalf. If you need a mortgage, please have the offer ready. Please stay in touch with your solicitor to make sure everything is going according to plan.

## What happens once I own 100%?

If you live in a house, your solicitor will be able to acquire the freehold of the property on your behalf – usually within three months of fully staircasing. You won't have to pay any more rent for your home, but you may have to pay towards the upkeep of the estate. If you live in a flat, you will continue to hold the lease but won't have to pay any more rent on your property. You will still have to pay service charges for the running of the building and the estate.

## More information

Your lease has all the essential information you need if you want to buy more shares in your home.

You can also find out more on our website:  
[www.chg.org.uk](http://www.chg.org.uk)