



CARTREF

RENTING HOMES ACT IS COMING WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU AS A TENANT?



The Renting Homes Act is the biggest change to housing law in Wales for decades, and will affect all tenants.

Across Wales, the Welsh Government plan for the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 to change the way all landlords in Wales rent their properties. It will improve how people rent, manage, and live in rented homes – which is good news for all tenants across Wales.

More on what it means for you on page 4.



THE FACES BEHIND THE PHONES

Our contact centre keeps things ticking, fielding up to 400 calls a day. Read more about what they do on **page 6**



MORE NEW HOMES

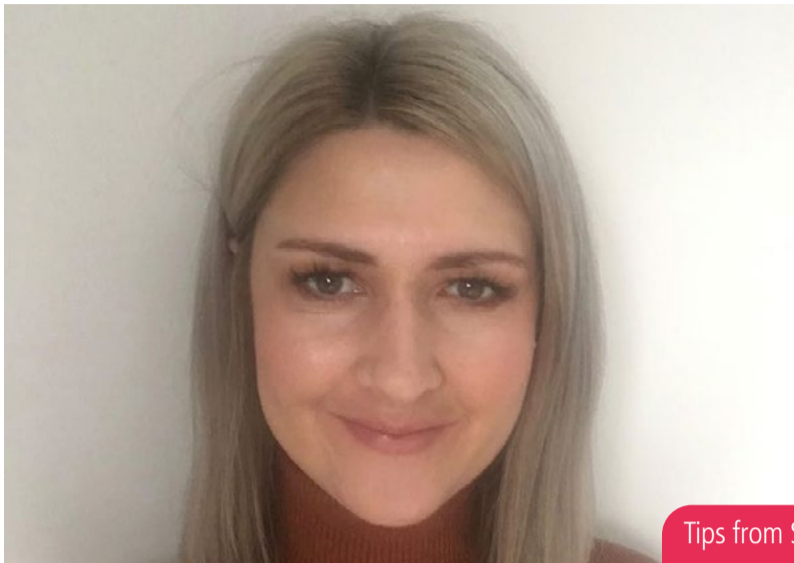
Tenants will soon be moving into new homes across the Borough, with planning in place for more to be built. Find out more on **page 5**



CHANCE TO WIN £50

by sharing your best pictures of Neath Port Talbot. Details of the competition can be found on **page 8**

Feeling the pinch? Steph can help...



Tips from Stephanie

The cost of living has increased significantly, seeing us pay more for food, energy, clothing, and fuel.

We know that the pandemic has already placed pressure on many of our households, whether from income changes or ill health, so here is some info from Stephanie from our financial inclusion team that could help ease the pressure.

Tenancy hardship fund

Up until recently, this grant was only available to private tenants, but now social housing tenants can benefit too.

If you built up eight weeks of rent arrears between 1st March 2020 and 31st December 2021 due to loss of income because of the pandemic, were not in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit during that time or haven't already had a grant to help with the arrears from elsewhere, you can apply for help to pay the money you owe. Just get in touch with Neath Port Talbot Council and ask for a tenancy hardship grant application form by emailing thg@npt.gov.uk or phone **01639 686868**

Help to pay rent because of sickness?

If you are off work because of sickness, expect to be off for more than six weeks and are claiming statutory sick pay (£95.85 per week) you could qualify for help to pay your rent from universal credit.

There are certain criteria to be met and eligibility depends on who else lives in your household.

If you would like advice on whether you could benefit, get in touch with our team on **01639 506623/financialinclusion@taitarian.co.uk**.

Support for Welsh Water bills

If you're a low-income household and in receipt of means-tested benefits, you may be eligible to receive support through Welsh Water's HelpU tariff, reducing your future charge to £250 for the year.

To apply for HelpU, you just need to share a little information about your household, and the income and benefits you receive. In some cases you may be asked to provide proof of your income too.

If your application is successful, any reduction in charges will be applied from the date Welsh Water receive your application.

Welsh Water also have their own customer assistance fund for those who are in over £150 of debt with their water bills and have a poor credit score.

Information on both these schemes on the website: www.dwrcymru.com/en/support-with-bills

Our financial inclusion team is here to support you with money worries, budgeting help and claiming benefits. If you are feeling the pinch, we are the team to help.

Giving us a call has made a huge difference for many, so please get in touch. Call **01639 506623** or email: financialinclusion@taitarian.co.uk.

Tom's gardening tips

Tom, a tenant, from Banwen is a keen gardener and has some great tips for you.

Managing your crop

Growing your own fruit and veg is great for your health and pocket.

If growing goes well, you can end up growing more than you can eat so end up giving away your crop to friends and family.

A way to avoid this is to stagger sowing and planting, giving you food continuously during the growing months.

What to grow

I plant leeks, spring onions, lettuce and carrots in my garden. I interplant salad greens, spring onions and radish. Varieties like 'Tom Thum', Little Gem, any mixed baby leaf collection or 'cut and come again' are beautiful for making a really fresh salad which can be enjoyed all summer.

Carrots, potatoes and runner beans grow well even in pots, but the trick is to water them well.

I love tomatoes, and I stick to the tumbling cherry type as they fruit the whole season.

You pick as they ripen, and the plant continues to grow on and produce. Kale is not only a superfood but it grows all year and pests don't like it!

You can pick off as many leaves as you like, and the plant will keep growing and produce more.

Avoiding pests

Carefully choosing what you plant and how you plant can confuse many garden pests.

Any gardener will tell you slugs are enemy number one, but I don't use any chemical insect killers or repellents to deter them. Instead, crushed eggshells and various nutshells seem to limit slug damage. I've found that copper or iron wire made into rings, placed on the soil around a plant you want to protect also seems to deter them too as does planting marigolds around the veg plot.

Get your free seeds

Inspired to get gardening like Tom? Get in touch for free seeds.

Email community@taitarian.co.uk with your name and address by May 15th and we will get seeds posted to you.

Pick from one of the following options.

- Dwarf French beans,
- Carrots
- Basil
- Pumpkin
- Marrow

Let us know how you get on by sending pictures of your planting to community@taitarian.co.uk



Tom at his garden in Banwen

Welcome from Linda

Welcome to the first edition of Cartref, our new style tenant newspaper.

We will send you a copy on a regular basis so you can keep up to date with important information and community news. As you can see, this edition features fantastic advice from people who work for us, our in-house experts if you like.

The cost of living is a real worry with the cost of gas and oil rising and the energy cap going up. Together with food costs and the impact of Covid may have had, we know it's a challenging time for lots of you.

That's why we asked Steph from our financial inclusion team to offer some really helpful tips on page two on what help is out there. However, if you are struggling financially then please get in touch with her or her team.

We also catch up with our contact centre team, the voices of Tai Tarian. They're the ones you speak to when you call us with a query or to report a repair.

In this edition, you'll also find details about the Renting Homes (Wales) Act and the changes coming into effect in July. Then we have a budget but tasty recipe, some Sudoku to get the brain cells going and the chance to win a £50 voucher just by sharing a picture of your favourite place in Neath Port Talbot.

Throughout the paper, you will find lots of funny looking squares which you can scan with your phone to get more information on the topic. There's more information about how they work below.

We would love to hear what you thought about our first edition of Cartref. If you have ideas of what you would like to see in future papers or would like to receive future copies electronically get in touch with our communications team media@taitarian.co.uk

And finally, just to put your minds at rest, we're pleased to say that the newspaper is fully recyclable, so when you're finished with it, just pop it in your black recycling box, whilst the plastic wrapping it came in can go in with your food recycling.

Linda

Chief Executive



Chief Executive Linda Whittaker

What's this funny looking thing?



QR Codes have been around for years but became more popular during the pandemic with us all using them to show Covid passes or to check in at the pub.

If you see a code in Cartref, grab your smart phone open your camera and hover over the code.

This will bring up the website page you need. Just tap to open.

If you don't have a smart phone, you can visit our website and use the search bar to find info on the topic.

Retrofitting our homes – What's it all about?

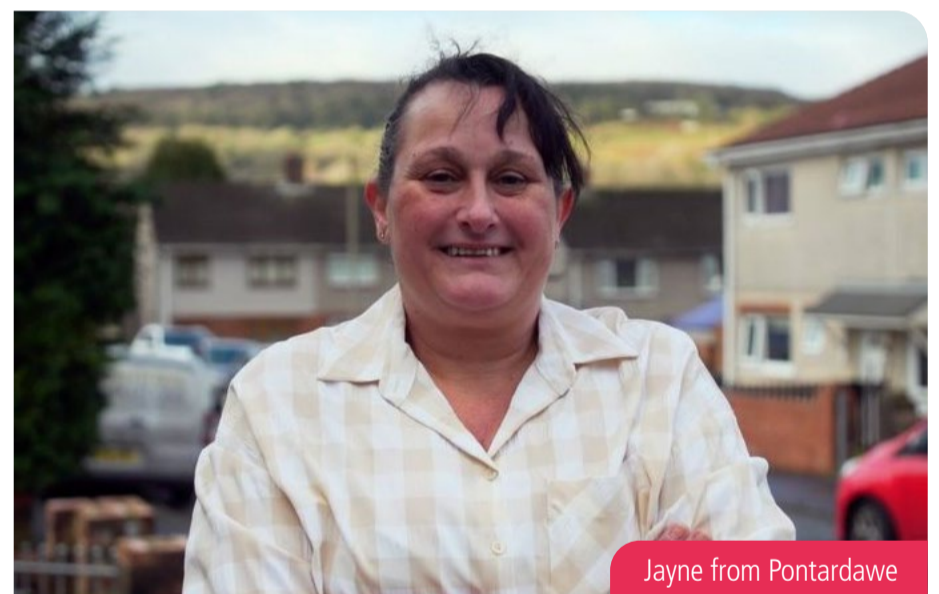
Back in 2019 we said we wanted to be carbon neutral by 2030. Being carbon neutral means that over the coming years we are going to do everything we can to significantly reduce the carbon dioxide we release into the atmosphere.

As a large business our emissions come from lots of sources, our offices, our fleet of vehicles and of course your homes, of which we have over 9,000. Lots of our homes were built 50-60 years ago, so we know there is work to be done to make them more energy efficient and to reduce their carbon emissions.

Along with 26 other housing associations and partners we joined the Optimised Retrofit Programme and will work on 100 of our homes to trial new energy saving measures.

The programme includes installing more efficient technology to help us power your home in a more environmentally friendly way. This could be things like solar panels, heating upgrades or better insulation.

More energy efficient homes reduce carbon, have lower energy usage and higher comfort within homes.



Jayne from Pontardawe

Jayne from Pontardawe has been part of the trial and tells us why she got involved.

"We all have to do our bit for the planet. As part of this I have had a smart meter which really makes you more aware of what energy you are using and how much it is costing.

Me and my daughter end up going around the house to see what we can switch off, she even does it when she goes over her friend's house now."

"The new monitoring system has just been installed so it's early days but I'm looking forward to seeing what it

finds and what measures I can take to reduce the amount of energy I use."

"I'm proud to be part of the project, if everyone did a little bit, well that turns into a big bit doesn't it, which can only be good for the planet."

Details of more retrofit projects we have planned will be in the next edition of Cartref.

Watch our explainer video on retrofit here:



Roxanne our Tenancy Liaison Officer talks retrofit

The way you rent is changing



The Renting Homes Act is the biggest change to housing law in Wales for decades, and will affect all tenants.

Across Wales the Welsh Government plan for the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 to change the way all landlords in Wales rent their properties. It will improve how people rent, manage, and live in rented homes – which is good news for all tenants across Wales.

What does it mean for me?

Under the new law, tenants will become 'contract-holders'. Tenancy agreements will be replaced with 'occupation contracts'. Tai Tarian will be known as a "Community Landlord".

The new law will make renting easier and provide greater security for all tenants. This means:

- Receiving a written contract setting out your rights and responsibilities.
- An increase in the 'no fault' notice period from two to six months.

- Greater protection for you from eviction.
- The same succession rights to pass on your home in the event of your death.
- More flexible arrangements for joint contract-holders, making it easier to add or remove others to your contract.

No need to worry

You will still be able to live in your home, you will still pay rent, and we will still do your repairs and look after your estates and communal areas. We have been working closely with Welsh Government, Community Housing Cymru and other housing organisations to prepare for the changes, and our staff will be working hard to ensure the changes are implemented as seamlessly as possible.

What do I need to do?

Just have a good read of the information guides and watch the video on the Welsh Government website (QR code below) We will keep you up to date with the changes between now and July. You can also keep up to date by regularly visiting the Welsh Government website.



Find out more

To find out more about the new legislation, have a look at the Welsh Government website by scanning the QR code.



A new way to apply for housing!

We have been working on creating a new portal to make applying for housing with us easier and the good news is we are almost ready to launch.

So what's changed?

Up until recently we have asked prospective applicants to complete an expression of interest form on our website.

Our applications team would then contact them to carry out a full assessment of their needs and to see if they were eligible for housing with us, prioritising their application in line with our policies.

Due to high demand, it could take anywhere between 10 – 15 weeks before we could carry out that assessment. The wait could sometimes be even longer before people could bid on properties, while we waited for them to provide important documents, such as evidence of income or health needs.

With our new portal, people can do this themselves. We still ask for all the important information up front, but we'll now be able to give them an expected decision on their application very quickly.

The information we ask for hasn't changed so completing the application can take around an hour. Evidence is still important, so we have the option for people to save their application and go back in if they need to find medical information, bank statements and other key documents.

We have included helpful information on each section to answer the questions we expect people to have as they complete their application.

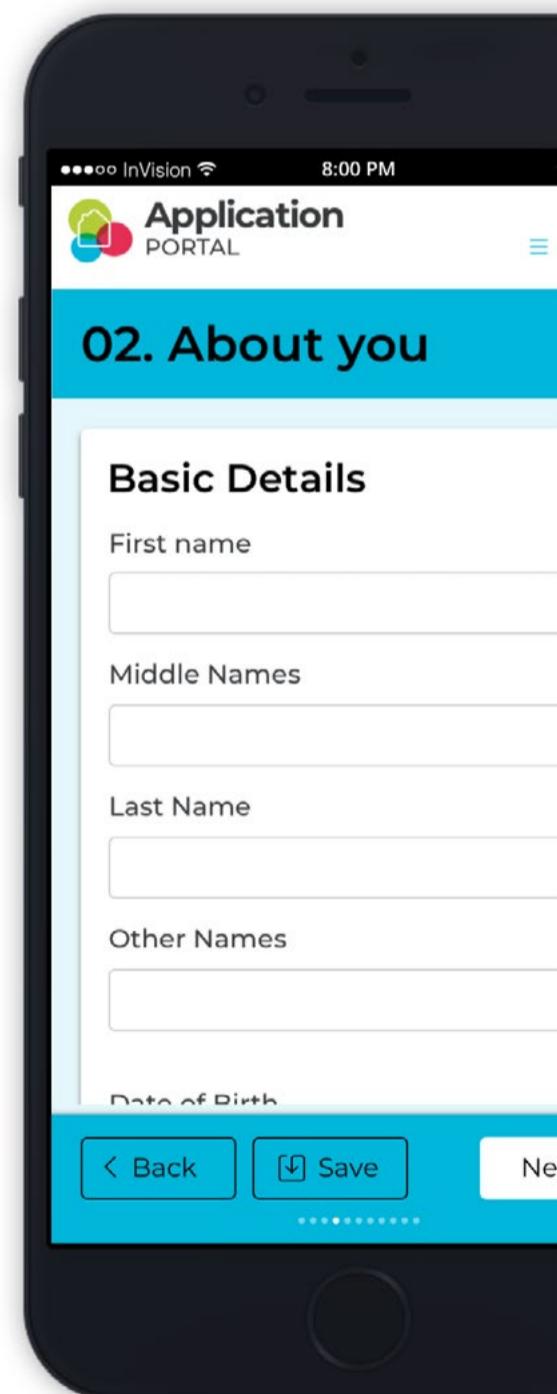
If you know someone who has recently applied for housing with us, our team will be in touch shortly. If someone is looking for a home with us they will shortly be able to apply via our website.

Our team will also be happy to help applicants along the way, they just need to call **0300 777 0000**.

What's next?

In the near future Homes by Choice will also change making it easier for applicants to see the properties they can bid on, even suggesting alternatives in areas close by.

Watch this space!



More new homes on the way

Tenants will soon be moving into new homes which have been built recently at Windsor Road in Neath, Melin Close in Melin, Cae Nant Terrace in Skewen and Heol Llwyn Celyn in Caewern.



An artists impression of County Flats, Sandfields

Building new, sustainable homes for rent is a big part of what we do. Over the past few years, we have built almost 100 new homes.

There is a big demand for affordable, energy efficient homes and earlier this year we had the green light to build even more. In the coming weeks work will begin to build a total of 77 new homes across two sites - 25 at Pant Celydd in Margam and 52 at Eaglesbush, off Meadow Road in Neath.

Andrew Hall Development Manager at Tai Tarian said: "In Margam, a variety of properties including flats and family homes will be built by local firm CJ Construction. Work will start very soon with homes ready in Autumn 2023.

Eaglesbush, just off Meadow Road in Neath, will be our biggest development to date.

Once again, the project will include flats, large family homes and bungalows and is expected to be ready in early 2024."

As with all our recent builds, the new homes will be environmentally friendly, with high levels of insulation, highly efficient heating systems and integrated solar panels.

They will also feature extra ventilation and LED lighting. As well as starting work on these two new projects, new homes are taking shape at County Flats on Aberavon seafront. This landmark development includes 55 new flats and the renovation of a further 72.

The project will use innovative technology and cutting-edge construction methods to create some of the most sustainable homes in Wales.

The Pant Celydd development will consist of 25 units:

- 16 x 1-bed flat
- 4 x 2-bed flat
- 4 x 2-bed houses
- 1 x 3-bed house

52 units will be built at Eaglesbush

- 14 x 1-bed flats
- 2 x 2-bed flats
- 5 x 2-bed bungalows
- 22 x 2-bed houses
- 6 x 3-bed houses
- 3 x 4-bed house



New development in Melin

Putting a stop to abuse



Online, on the phone or in person, our staff should not have to face abuse.

We are here to help and will always do our best for you. If we do get things wrong occasionally, then we will always try and put things right – we're human, mistakes happen.

You may be frustrated. You may be angry. You may think it's okay to shout, scream or even threaten our staff. It's not.

Whether it's in person, on the phone or on social media, please think before you get angry and consider the effect it has on our staff – they're just ordinary people trying their best to help you.

If we do get things wrong, then please use the proper channels to allow us to put them right – www.taitarian.co.uk/feedback

The faces behind the phones

If you've ever called us, then you will probably have spoken to one of our contact centre team.

Fielding up to 400 calls a day, (hitting over 600 during recent storms), they're the friendly voices you hear, putting your mind at ease if you're reporting a repair or trying to find an answer to your queries.

But what is the job really like, what type of calls do they get, and who are the people behind the headsets? We went to find out.

Ben, Rhian, Olivia, Louise and team leader, Candice are all busy chatting away on the phone when we arrive at their office. They are just five of the 17-strong team of contact centre advisors here at Tai Tarian, with the rest taking your calls whilst working from home. In between calls, Candice gives us a quick round-up of what the team do:

"We're the first point of contact when people call Tai Tarian. It's important we know exactly what's going on in the organisation as we could be asked anything."

"We liaise with our planners to organise appointments for our trades to carry out repairs, we also answer queries about rent, tenancies or applying for housing. We could be talking to tenants about anything."



Ben sorts a query.

Rhian, who is the longest serving member of the team, with 12 years experience adds: "We do try and give first-time fixes over the phone. If there's a simple fix we can talk them through that gets things sorted quickly and without the need to have someone go out to them, then that's great."

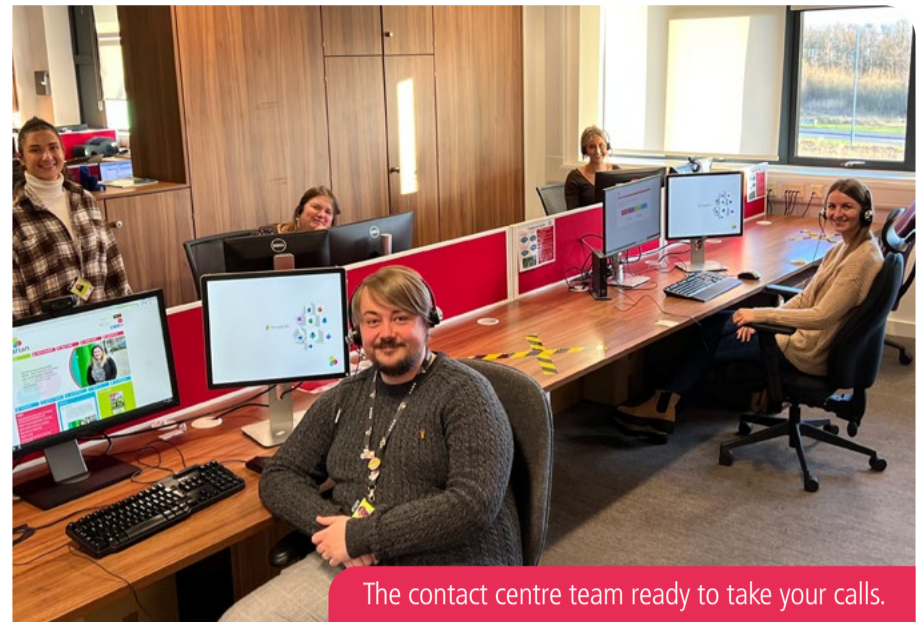
"But to do that we have to get as much information about the problem as we can. That also helps us determine if the job is an emergency that requires an immediate response, or if we can class it as urgent or even non-urgent. We have to ask a lot of questions."

Olivia adds: "Although we do have a guide as to what to ask, we know that every call is personal, and we have to be flexible in responding to the needs of the caller."

So, what makes a good customer service advisor?

Candice explains: "I look for someone with a background in customer services. They need to be compassionate, be a good listener, empathetic and have a bit of a personality."

"Liking a good chat is also important" adds Ben. "I love talking to our callers and just having a good natter with them. By the time I've finished, we've had a moan about the weather and I've sorted their query. We are all local, so we have the same mentality and same humour as our callers and so I find it very easy to talk to them."



The contact centre team ready to take your calls.

"Having said that though, it's also important to adapt your approach depending on who is on the other end of the line. Sometimes, we're the only person the caller will speak to all day, so there is a big responsibility in making sure you're being friendly and trying your best to help them."

New starters get up to four weeks training, shadowing more experienced colleagues before taking on calls themselves. Louise recalls the first time she fielded a call by herself:

"I was terrified when the phone rang, hoping I'd remember my training and that it wouldn't be too difficult a call. Even though it was a relatively straight forward query, I knew that I had my team around me to help if I needed it and that I could just put the caller on hold whilst I found out the correct information for them."

Olivia adds: "Helping each other out is important. We're a really close team and we do rely on each other for support. This was difficult when we were all working from home during the height of the pandemic, but we made it work and now we get to spend a bit more time in the office with each other, which is great."

That support is extremely important when callers get angry or even abusive. Candice said: "Unfortunately, we do get calls which can be quite upsetting."

"Whatever the caller's frustration is, we are here to try and help and not to be shouted at."

"We all live in the same communities as our callers, we may pass each other in the street or in the shops, our children may go to the same schools, we are just ordinary people like them and just ask

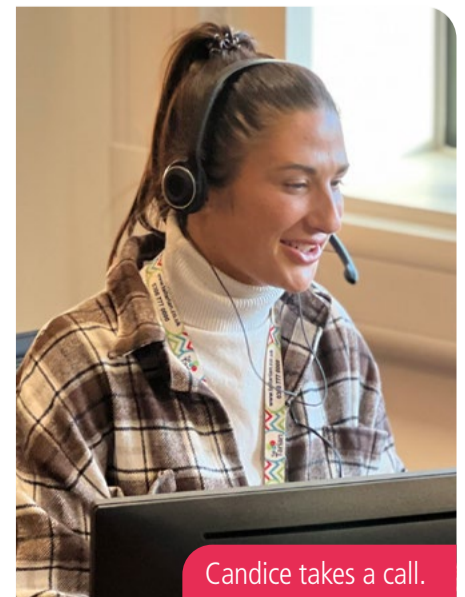
for a little understanding when we are trying to help as best as we can and don't deserve some of the verbal abuse we receive. Although there can be some unpleasant calls, there are some lighter moments too. Ben recalls a tenant calling in to report that, somehow, a seagull had become trapped behind their kitchen cupboards.

"No-one had any idea how it got there, but obviously we had to get it out. We sent a carpenter straight away who had to take out the units to free the bird. I'm pleased to say there was a happy ending and it was released unharmed."

The final word goes to Candice:

"On the whole, working in the contact centre is very worthwhile. Knowing you can help people who need it and that you can make their day that little bit better is very rewarding. If they put the phone down knowing that we've helped them in some way, then that's all that matters."

With that, it's back on with the headset and to take the next call of the day – whatever it will entail. Over the next couple of months there will be more ways for you to reach us like live chat on our website.



Candice takes a call.

Love your local... library



Song and Rhyme fun

Today, libraries offer so much more than just books, they have become a real hub of community life. A sanctuary for many and a place to socialise, use technology and learn.

With a range of groups, you can meet like-minded people to find out about local history, enjoy a good book together at reading club or even learn a new craft. Babies & toddlers can enjoy Song & Rhyme classes, with lots on offer for older children in school holidays including art, craft and even Lego building clubs.

Joining the library is free and membership gives you access to 1000s of books at your fingertips, the hard bit is choosing your favourites to take home to enjoy. Membership now comes with the bonus of being able to loan a wide range of digital resources including e-books, e-magazines, e-newspapers and audiobooks, all downloadable onto your own devices.

A librarian's best bit: "We love it when we see parents here reading a book to their children, or adults using the space to socialise and learn new things.

"Our libraries are a place where everyone can feel comfortable to come in enjoy what we offer, with no expectation to spend any money." Libraries are free to join, so why not sign up today?!

Where to find your library

You can find area libraries at Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe, together with five branch libraries in Skewen, Glynneath, Baglan, Sandfields and Cwmafan.

There are also several independent, community managed libraries run by various groups and trusts. They offer an excellent range of library services, with access to all NPT library books.

These can be found in Blaengwynfi, Cymmer Afan, Taibach, Briton Ferry, Resolven, Seven Sisters and Gwaun Cae Gurwen.

Too far to travel or do you have mobility issues?

There is a home library and mobile library available. For more on this and full details of what libraries can offer you visit:

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/1214>

For the latest news on events or activities taking place at NPT Libraries, follow them on Facebook. Just search NPT Libraries.

Creating a buzz in local schools

Education is key to people having a good understanding of what can be done to improve biodiversity in our communities and Neath Port Talbot primary schools have embraced our education programme.

When we announced we wanted to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, we decided we would do it in partnership with our tenants and local communities, encouraging them to join us in 'changing our behaviours today, for the generations of tomorrow'.

As part of this, we visited Central Primary School in Port Talbot to speak to year-four pupils about biodiversity and the importance of nature.

The talk was brought to life for the youngsters by visiting nearby Talbot Memorial Park for a scavenger hunt.

There pupils were encouraged to look, feel and listen for things within the park, including their very own bird boxes, 10 of which were gifted to the school through our contractor CJ Construction Wales.

In the coming months, more schools will take part in the education programme encouraging them to tap into our community benefits fund to enhance their own eco aims with the supply of plants, trees and resources, to spruce up their outdoor spaces.

Amy Hines, Tai Tarian's Economic and Social Regeneration Assistant said:

"Our biodiversity education programme is all about educating young people about the importance of nature.

"Our presentation is really interactive but the real fun is had when we get outdoors and everything is brought to life for pupils. We hope to leave a lasting legacy on young people locally."



Getting in touch with nature at Central Primary.

Fancy becoming a tenant board member?

Could you be this person?

Before we recruit there will be an opportunity to learn more about the role and take part in training and development so that you are 'board ready' More on this in the next Cartref.

Our board members, play an important role in providing strategic leadership, monitoring our performance and making decisions about our finances, standards and policies.

Later this year we will be looking to recruit for new tenant board members to join us.



Tea break challenge

How to play?

Sudoku is played on a grid of 9 x 9 spaces. Within the rows and columns are 9 "squares" (made up of 3 x 3 spaces).

Each row, column and square needs to be filled out with the numbers 1-9, but these can only be used once.

Give it a go!

			5					6
			8	7		3		2
2	7		3				8	1
				3	4	9		
7	9	3		5		6	1	4
		8	7	9				
9	2				3			5
5		6		8	7			
3					5			

9	1		7					
	3	2	6		9		8	
		7		8		9		
	8	6		3		1	7	
3								6
	5	1		2		8	4	
		9		5		3		
	2		3		1	4	9	
					2		6	1

Competition Time – Win £50!

Where is your favourite outdoor place in Neath Port Talbot?

Spending time outdoors does wonders for your wellbeing so where do you go to relax and unwind?

Send a picture and tell us why you love it to media@taitarian.co.uk or WhatsApp 07772 912064 to be in with a chance of winning a £50 shopping voucher.

Get your pics to us by 10th May. Our favourite pictures will be shared in the next edition of Cartref.



Need to get in touch?

Phone numbers:

☎ **0300 777 0000**
(General enquiries 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday)

☎ **0300 777 3000**
(Report a repair)

Ask@taitarian.co.uk
www.taitarian.co.uk

Easter opening hours:

Our offices will be closed on Good Friday, 15th April and Easter Monday 18th April.

If you need to report an emergency repair during this time, please call

☎ **0300 777 3000.**

Register for an e-version of Cartref

If you want to receive future editions of Cartref via e-mail instead of post, please let our communications team know at media@taitarian.co.uk



Get cooking

Jack Monroe is well known for campaigns on poverty issues, a regular on the news in particular this year as she raised awareness of the huge increases on the cost of food and the removal of value items from mainstream supermarkets.

Her campaign has seen Asda bring back their full range of smart price items as the same price as last year. Jack has a website 'Bootstrap Cook' packed full of budget recipes all costed out. Here is one of our favourites:

Peach and Chickpea Curry

Serves 2 for dinner, with leftovers for a light lunch.

- 1 400g can of chickpeas (drained)
- 1 onion
- 1 fat clove of garlic
- 1 chilli
- A splash of oil
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 x 400g tin of peaches (or apricots or mandarins)
- 1 x 400g carton or tin of chopped tomatoes
- A handful of fresh coriander, finely chopped
- 1 stock cube, veg or chicken

Method

First drain your chickpeas and rinse them vigorously to get rid of the stagnant water that they'll have been sitting in. Pop them in some fresh water in a saucepan and boil rapidly for 10 minutes to soften

Meanwhile, peel and finely chop the onion and garlic, and chop the chilli. Pour a little oil into a medium, heavy bottomed pan,



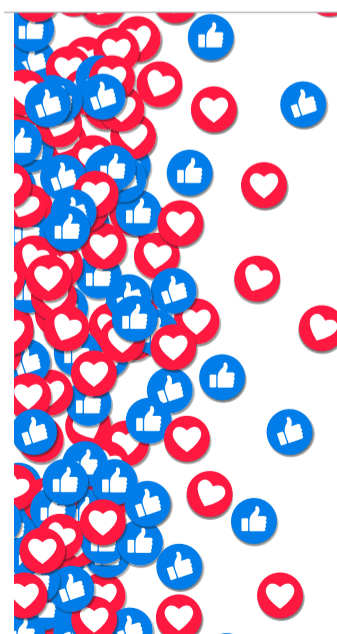
and add the onion, garlic and chilli, then the cumin, and cook gently on a low heat for a few minutes to soften the onion. Don't be tempted to turn the heat up – burnt onions will permeate your whole curry, whereas sweating them will add a delicious sweetness. Drain the peaches, reserving the juice, and chop into small pieces.

Add to the onion mixture in the pan, along with the reserved juice. By this time, the chickpeas should have finished boiling, so remove them from the heat and drain them, and tip them into the peaches-and-onion pan. Pour the chopped tomatoes in, add the coriander, and crumble over the stock cube, then stir everything together. Reduce the heat to a low setting, and cook gently for 30 minutes. You may need to add a cup of water to the sauce if it starts to get a bit thick. Stir well, and serve.

'Peach and chickpea curry' recipe from A Girl Called Jack by Jack Monroe. Jack has written 6 cookbooks, why not visit your local library and borrow a copy.

COOKING ON A BOOTSTRAP – by Jack Monroe, bestselling author of 'A Girl Called Jack'

www.cookingonabootstrap.com



Keep up to date with community news and great advice by following us on Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and Twitter. Just search for @TaiTarian

