

Linkup

AUTUMN 2006

united
welsh

LINKUP CIRCULATION 3,100

A newsletter for and by United Welsh tenants

Summer fundays!

Summertime and the living is easy! Communities and tenants associations around the United Welsh area held fundays, carnivals and took part in other events during the long hot (and sometimes rainy) summer.

See pages 6 and 7 for the full story

Hoffech chi ddarllen Linkup yn Gymraeg? Edrychwch ar Hysbysfwrdd (tudalen cefn) am fanylion...

Would you like to be able to read Linkup in Welsh? See the Noticeboard for full details...



Contents

PAGES 4 & 5

An Inspector calls... In December Welsh Assembly Government inspectors will be looking at the quality of United Welsh services. UW are taking applications from tenants who want to take part in focus groups with WAG inspectors.

Save energy and be safe! Some tips on how to cut waste and save money and to help, there are free low energy light bulbs for tenants on state benefits. **Plus**, the importance of regular servicing of gas boilers

PAGES 6 & 7

Summer fundays - thanks to the hard work of communities and tenants' associations around the UW area people had a cracking summer!



PAGES 8 & 9

Troubled by noisy neighbours? You don't have to suffer - Linkup explains how. **Broken downpipes or damaged fencing on your estate?** Tenants are invited to assist our estate inspectors in identifying problems in your neighbourhood. **voice4tenants** - Linkup reports on the Annual General Meeting and an invitation to the TPAS/WTF conference.

PAGES 10 & 11

'Timeout' features Richard Mann, UW's Director of Development plus tips on having a fun and safe Bonfire Night. **Need rehousing?** Be an early bird and check out UW's website for the fortnightly Select a Home advert or have it sent to you by email.

PAGE 12

Don't miss our busy **Noticeboard**. The Linkup editorial team want all our readers to enjoy the



magazine and we will try to provide it in a format that's best for you. Read how you can find out more. Plus, UW is looking for a tenant to join its Service Improvement Steering Group and a tribute to Sue Phillips.

Don't forget!

If you need an emergency repair when the offices are closed, please contact the special United Welsh number **(01495) 769624**
REMEMBER - THIS SERVICE IS FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY!



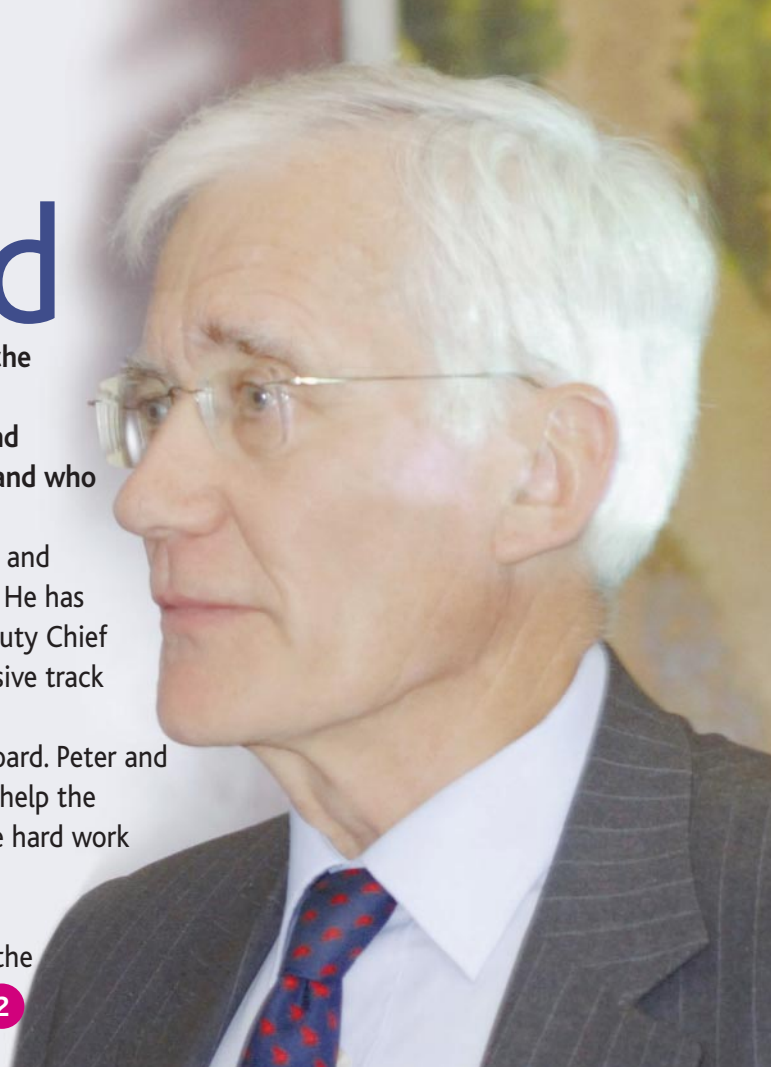
New Chair of the Board

United Welsh has appointed Peter Laing as the new Chair of the Board. Peter will take over from Phillip Westwood who had completed four years in post and felt that it was time to stand down. Grateful thanks go to Phillip who did such a great job and who will continue to sit on the Board.

Peter has been a Board member at United Welsh since 2003 and brings a considerable amount of experience to the role of Chair. He has already enjoyed a successful career in the Finance sector as Deputy Chief Executive of the Principality Building Society and has an impressive track record of appointments and membership.

United Welsh are fortunate to have such expertise on the Board. Peter and the rest of the Board members give up their time voluntarily to help the organisation and its tenants. We should all be confident that the hard work of staff and the support of such a strong Board will result in the delivery of quality services to all United Welsh customers.

You can find out more about the Board of United Welsh on the website: www.uwha.co.uk



Exchanges –

helping you move!

Sometimes waiting for a move to a more suitable home can take a very long time. Exchanges can help you to find a more suitable home by swapping your existing one with another tenant. You move into their home and they move into yours... its as simple as that!

If you live in Cardiff and are a tenant of United Welsh, Cardiff City Council or any other Cardiff-based housing association and you want to exchange, you can now join one main register. This single register lists all those who want to move regardless of who their current landlord is.

Access to the Cardiff exchange register is available in the United Welsh Cardiff office and in all Housing Association and Council area offices across the city. It lists all the tenants who want to exchange, the type of home they have at the moment and what they are looking for.

So what do you need to do?

Remember, you will need to get the permission of both landlords before any move takes place.

- If you live in Cardiff and want to exchange please contact the Customer Services Team at United Welsh and ask for information on exchanges. Alternatively you can call into the Cardiff office and see the register for yourself.
- If you live outside Cardiff and want to exchange then a separate exchange system exists. You should still contact the Customer services team to ask for information on exchanges and one of the advisors will help you.

TEXT MESSAGING AND E-MAILS...

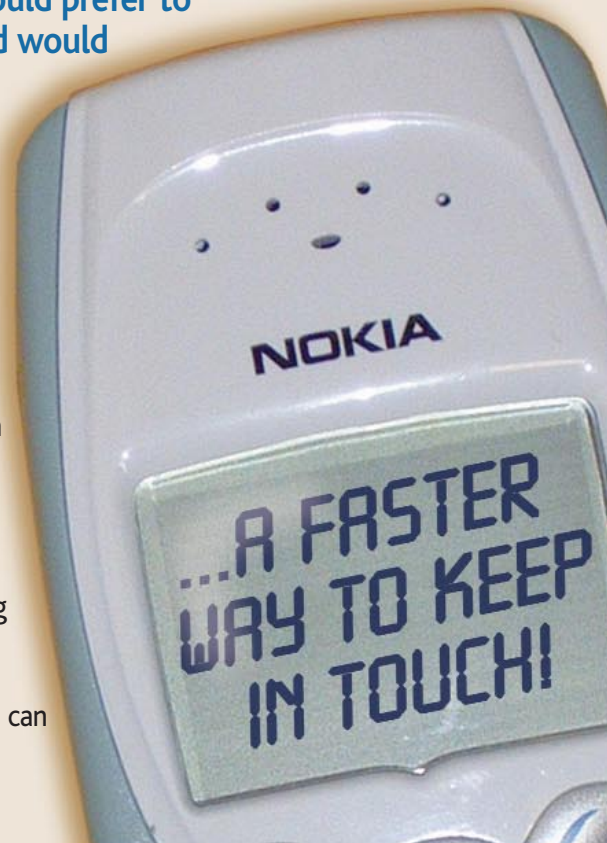
United Welsh recently wrote to everyone to ask how they would prefer to keep in touch. Many people said they had a mobile phone and would be happy to get information by text, others said they would prefer to get it by e-mail.

Jan Waters is co-ordinating the United Welsh response to the survey results. "Using texts and e-mails means that we can provide important information to people much more quickly." Jan told us. "Over the next few months we will be piloting the use of texts to those tenants whose accounts are falling into rent arrears. Tenants will be provided with their current rent balances and asked to make payments or contact United Welsh for further advice or help."

Jan pointed out that this is not just about speeding up rent arrears information. "Rent arrears was the simplest procedure to pilot the scheme on. In time, we aim to roll this service out to other areas such as repair appointments, satisfaction surveys etc. and try to make sure we communicate with people in ways that are best for them."

If you would prefer to receive information from the Association via your mobile phone or through e mails but have not yet told United Welsh, please ring the Customer Services team on 0800 294 0195 and ask them to add this information to their records.

If at any time you don't wish to receive information via the text service you can always stop simply by letting United Welsh know.



An Inspector calls...

As part of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to regulation and continuous improvement of housing associations, United Welsh is due to be inspected by the Wales Audit Office between 4th - 15th December 2006.

The inspectors will be investigating the quality of United Welsh services and looking at the ways in which they work to improve these services for the benefit of customers.

It will be important for the inspectors to talk to tenants and get their views on the services provided by United Welsh. They will be contacting a selection of tenants by telephone and also holding meetings that all tenants will be invited to attend.

You will receive more detailed information on the inspection over the coming weeks but should you have any questions please give United Welsh a call on 029 20858100 or e-mail: tellmemore@uwha.co.uk

Would you like to take part in the Welsh Audit Office inspection of United Welsh?

The Association are taking applications from tenants volunteering to take part in focus groups with the WAO inspectors.

If you are interested in putting yourself or someone else forward (please ask for their agreement first!), contact David Williams on 029 20 858166 or 029 20 858126 or by e-mail at dwilliams@uwha.co.uk.

Alternatively, you can apply to David in writing to Ty Cennydd, Castle Street, Caerphilly CF83 1NZ, giving your name, address and contact number.



Difficulties with

MOBILITY?

Tenants with disabilities or mobility problems can now apply for Physical Adaptation Grants (PAG's). PAG's are specifically designed for tenants with special requirements or disabilities and can be used to carry out specialist work such as the installation of stair lifts, grab rails, level and low access showers, etc.

This work will only be undertaken by United Welsh on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist (based in the Social Services department of the local council) who will assess whether there is a need for adaptation work. If you feel you need physical adaptations to your home then you should first contact your local Social Services office.

How can you apply?

- Contact Social Services who will appoint an Occupational Therapist to evaluate your needs.

- This evaluation will then be sent to the Housing department of the local authority for approval.
- If the local authority supports the adaptation then a Maintenance Officer from United Welsh will visit you and arrange for three quotations from approved builders to carry out the work.
- The quotations will then be sent to the Welsh Assembly Government for final approval. If the proposed PAG is successful then the Maintenance Officer can instruct the successful builder to carry out the work.

United Welsh will also carry out minor adaptations (for example lever taps, grab rails, etc) up to the value of £50 to help disabled tenants when other funding is not available.

'Save energy and cash' challenge

A recent British Gas campaign has challenged homeowners to save £60m in energy waste every year.

British Gas says it wants to encourage people to make simple changes to save money and be environmentally friendly.

Turning a thermostat down one degree or completely turning off a TV could each save a household nearly £50 a year. Surveys show that a million households in the UK waste £5bn worth of energy every year.



Energy changes - see how much you could save in a year*

£133 by turning off all stand-by products

£33 by switching to energy saving light bulbs

£30 by only boiling as much water as needed

£15 by only using dishwasher when full

£15 by putting silver foil behind radiators on outside walls

* Figures British Gas

You can enter your postcode into the British Gas "save a billion" website - to get information specific to your area to find out how energy efficient your home is and receive advice on reducing energy waste in your home.

Green Lights for United Welsh Tenants

United Welsh has a supply of low energy light bulbs to give away to tenants in receipt of state benefits. Please call in to the office at Ty Cennydd, Caerphilly, or Walters Buildings, Cardiff, to collect your free lightbulbs.

The silent killer

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas with no colour, taste or smell.

Exposure to quite low levels can cause brain damage or even death.



The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to those of flu and other viral infections. They include drowsiness, weakness, headaches, nausea and pains in the chest. If anyone in your home has any of these symptoms while a gas appliance is being used you should stop using the appliance until it has been checked. You should also consult a doctor.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can affect the way the brain works, so you may not be able to tell that anything is wrong or take any action before it's too late for you or your family.

United Welsh will service your gas appliances for free every year. Make sure that you keep your appointment with the engineers when they come to call or if you get a card to say they called while you were out, make a new appointment straight away.

Don't take the risk

...get it checked.



Van Communities First Partnership Fun Day

The Van Communities First Partnership annual Funday took place under a baking sun in July. The Van Communities events are always loaded with activities and this year was no exception, including graffiti art, african drums, dunk the firefighter and a magic show.

Jeff Cuthbert, AM for Caerphilly (left) presented the Community Centre with an X-Box games console, given by United Welsh, in recognition of the still growing importance of structured youth provision at the Centre.

Melanie Smith, a Community Services Worker with United Welsh said, "We are delighted with the support from the local community for the event. It's great to see so many families having fun and creating such a wonderful social occasion. The Van community centre adds enormous value to the local community and as an organisation we welcome the opportunity to support the centre on days like these".



Aber Valley Carnival

They now have five carnivals already under their belt, and the experience of the carnival organisation, mostly from SALT and the Aber Valley Communities First Partnership, really showed this year, with loads of attractions for all ages as well as the usual information stalls - the original point of the event.

The fabulous July weather helped and with a climbing wall, fair ground rides, fireman dunking and dance exhibitions to choose from, to name but a few, the entertainment was non-stop for the whole day.

All of the community events reported in Linkup rely on volunteers organising activities for their own communities. If you would like to be part of an event in your area, contact:

David Williams on 029 20 858166 or at dwilliams@uwha.co.uk

or e-mail tellmemore@uwha.co.uk and ask for more details.



Summer

Dinas Powys

The Dinas United Tenants' Association Summer Fun Day ran in August. The August rain failed to dampen the spirits of the local residents. With Tricky Ricky and Cirque de Soleil on hand to entertain and give a chance to try out circus skills, there was "hands on" african drumming, as well as the Teddy Bear's picnic, which has become a feature of the DUTA events.

Just in case there was anybody left not already wet, the local Fire Service let the younger children loose on the Fire Tender hoses - there'll have been no dry grass in Dinas Powys this summer! Well done to the committee of DUTA for another successful summer event.



Caerphilly Big Cheese

A huge event, the Big Cheese takes place every summer in the grounds of Caerphilly Castle, featuring an enormous funfair, bands, dancers and a host of other activities and displays.

United Welsh and SYDIC ran a stand together to publicise the Hengoed Diversionary Project, offering opportunities to see how a computer is built - a central feature of the Hengoed Project - as well as chances to try your hand at throwing a pot or sculpting a clay head. The Bearhunt ran through the weekend - find one of the United Welsh tokens hidden around the Big Cheese and win a bear - to the delight of a dozen young winners.

The Hengoed Project is well underway now and includes some of the young people from the area who first found out about the opportunities it can give through the Big Cheese display. Look for future reports of the Project in Linkup in the next year or so.



fundays!

CONCERNED ABOUT NOISE?

Troubled by noisy neighbours? There's a new website offering advice and information on how to deal with unreasonable noise from your neighbour at www.NoiseConcern.org.

If you prefer not to use the Internet or you don't have access to it, there's a helpline for

Noise Concern too on 01273 682223.

If the problem is about more than noise and you are experiencing anti-social behaviour you can find more advice and information on the Together website at www.together.gov.uk, which will give you details of who to contact in your area to help tackle the problem.

Of course you can always get advice and information from your housing officer at United Welsh by ringing the freephone number.

Do you have what it takes?

United Welsh has stated its commitment to improving services and involving tenants on many occasions in the past. Now they're aiming to bring both together in the most obvious way possible by directly involving tenants in monitoring the way in which services are delivered.

Working closely with voice4tenants, United Welsh is developing opportunities for tenants to become fully trained service inspectors with unprecedented access to staff and operations at United Welsh.

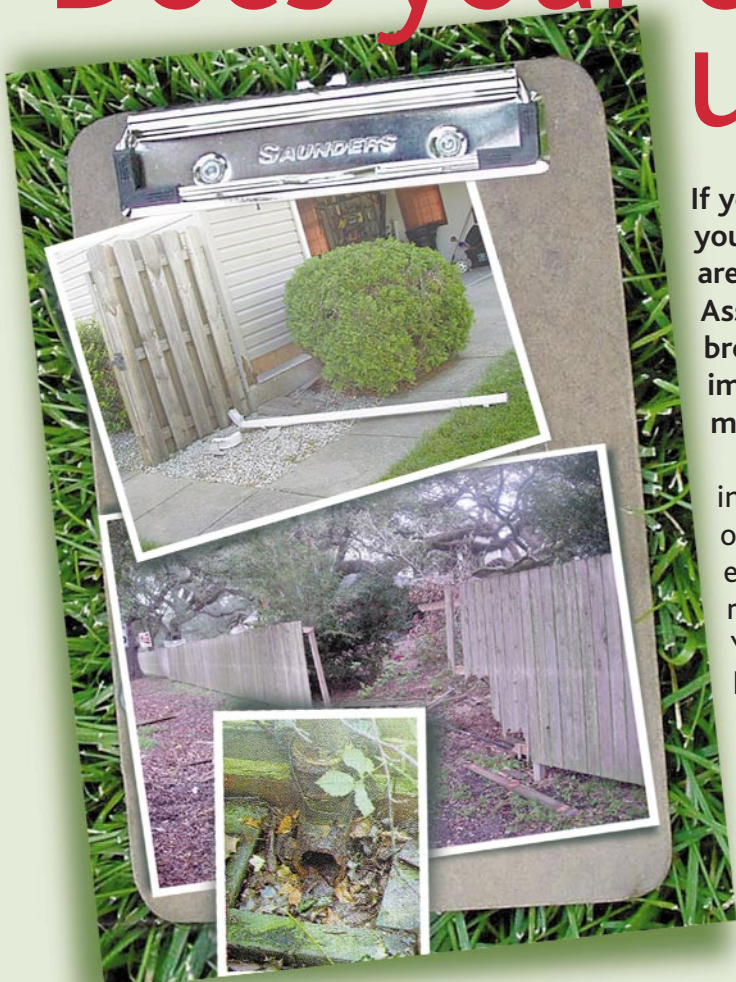
If you think you have what it takes to become a tenant inspector, have an objective approach, a willingness to undertake the training required and can commit up to 8 hours every three months,

please contact

David Williams on 029 20 858166 or at dwilliams@uwha.co.uk for an initial discussion.



Does your estate come up to scratch?



If you live in a group of houses owned by United Welsh, your housing officer will be making an inspection of the area once every three months or so to make sure the Association is aware of things like fencing repairs needed, broken downpipes and blocked drains etc. This is especially important where you pay a service charge for a grounds maintenance contractor to look after communal areas.

United Welsh already involve tenants in these estate inspections in some areas, but would like to make the opportunity open to tenants in all of the Association's estates. If you live in an area which should be inspected regularly and are interested, you could become involved. Your involvement would mean spending up to about an hour once every three months accompanying the housing officer around the area and discussing priorities for sorting out the results.

You can find out more by contacting your housing officer or by e-mailing tellmore@uwha.co.uk asking for details of how to become part of the estate inspections.

voice4tenants

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The second Annual General Meeting of voice4tenants was held at Caerphilly in September. The Executive Committee bade farewell to some long-serving members, including Val Friday, Alun Edwards, John Jackson and Christina Chidlow.

Val will be a familiar name to regular Linkup readers as the last Chair of the old Tenants' Consultative Committee and a committed supporter of tenant participation at United Welsh. Other commitments, including support for the Board of Tai Pawb, call Val away from the Executive Committee of v4t, although she remains a Board Member at United Welsh. The meeting wished Val well in her future endeavours.

The meeting expressed regret at the resignations of John Jackson and Alun Edwards, both very regular attenders of Committee meetings and both unable to continue due to failing health.

The Executive Committee also greeted new elected members to its ranks in Ann and Idris Pethers from Dinas Powys (pictured right) and Betty Bishop from Blackwood. All three have spent some of the last year attending the Executive Committee meetings as observers and co-opted members. Ann Pethers has recently taken on the role of Secretary to the Committee and will be working with United Welsh to develop the independence of voice4tenants even further.

Roger Dafydd remains as Chair of voice4tenants, with John Newnham, vice-chair, Ann Pethers, Secretary and Ed White, Treasurer.

In his address to the AGM, Roger Dafydd encouraged the meeting that they should be pleased with the progress of voice4tenants in the last year, a year which saw a high

“...with the committed support of United Welsh, v4t looks forward to a year ahead of considerable development as an organisation and figurehead for tenant participation at United Welsh.”

profile public launch of the organisation amongst other things. In spite of the unsuccessful application for a Tenant Empowerment Grant, with the committed support of United Welsh Roger told the meeting he was looking forward to a year ahead of considerable development of voice4tenants as an organisation and as a figurehead for tenant participation at United Welsh.



TPAS CYMRU AND
WELSH TENANTS' FEDERATION
ANNUAL
JOINT CONFERENCE

COMING
OF AGE

SPONSORED BY:

united
welsh

'COMING OF AGE', the TPAS Cymru & Welsh Tenants Federation Joint Annual Conference will take place from the 15 - 17th November 2006 at Hotel Metropole, Llandrindod Wells.

As they have for the past four years, United Welsh will be sponsoring five places at the conference for tenants who are already active in their communities or in voice4tenants, or are interested in finding out more about tenant participation. The Association will pay for the conference, accommodation and travel, you can even get a contribution to child care costs if you need it.

Places will be given on first come first served basis, so contact David Williams on 029 20 858166 or at dwilliams@uwha.co.uk without delay to book yours. The conferences are a great opportunity to learn about what's new in tenant participation, what it all means and what other people are doing. They're also really good fun!

TIME-OUT

THIS EDITION LINKUP HAS A 'TIME-OUT' WITH RICHARD MANN
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT FOR UNITED WELSH

Richard Mann is the Director of Development for United Welsh. He has been with the organisation since July 2005 and has worked in housing for over eight years. We took some 'TIME-OUT' with Richard to find out a little more about the man in charge of development.

What was your first job?

My first job was working for Burton Menswear in Cardiff, having left college with an HNC in Business Administration. I worked for Burtons for about three years and had a fantastic time, albeit I shudder looking back at some of the clothes we wore during the 80's. Suffice to say my wife hasn't seen any of the photos.

What do you enjoy the most about working for United Welsh?

United Welsh is a very flexible and open-minded organisation. We believe building houses is much more than just bricks and mortar, and issues like looking after the environment are very important to us. Many of our houses have solar panels, ground heated hot water and special insulation to keep in the warmth. I am really passionate about this type of work as it helps the environment and also benefits tenants by reducing their fuel bills.

What's your idea of the 'perfect' holiday?

My family and friends on tour with the British Lions to New Zealand, Australia or South Africa. I don't think Alison, my wife, would enjoy the trip unless we dropped her off in Tobago along the way.

What's been your best moment so far working for United Welsh?

Probably working on a day care centre for people with autism on behalf of Caerphilly Council. The building has been developed without any financial help from the Welsh Assembly and should be finished by March 2007. It will provide some great opportunities for people with a range of learning difficulties. I'm sure

Linkup will print some good pictures of the building once it is finished!

Favourite restaurant in Wales?

My favourite restaurant in Wales has to be the burger van inside the Millennium Stadium. Is there nothing better than going to an International match, having a bit of food and watching Wales lift the 2007 Six Nations Trophy?

How do you see United Welsh developing in the next five years?

I think there are lots of opportunities out there for United Welsh. We are hoping to build 400 new homes in South Wales over the next five years. We will also be looking at ways of building more homes with private developers that people can afford to buy or rent. It's called Low Cost Home Ownership and we want to be a flagship developer for this scheme. It's all about helping people get a foot on the housing ladder.

You've won the lottery, what do you buy first?

I would buy debentures at the Millennium Stadium (there is a bit of a recurring theme going on here as I'm sure you can see) for my friends and family. I am just such a passionate rugby follower that it would be important to me to have the opportunity to go and see all the matches.

After that, I guess I would give money away to my family to ease all those financial worries.

What would you say has been your greatest achievement?

This has to be my three children. They make what can often seem a very long day worthwhile.

How do you relax?

With a four-year old, a ten-year old and a twelve-year old, it's very difficult to relax. Mainly watching them play rugby and football on Saturdays. I coached rugby for five years but have taken a year out. And I am an avid surfer - most weekends I can be found in Rest Bay and once a year I manage to get down to Cornwall.



HAVE A SAFE BONFIRE NIGHT...



The Firework Code has been developed to help us all use fireworks safely and to treat them with the respect they deserve:

November 5th can be a great time for family enjoyment and fun. Who doesn't have fond memories of childhood bonfire nights and fireworks displays? Make sure you and your family have a safe and enjoyable Fireworks night this year by following a few sensible precautions.

It's always better to go to an **organised fireworks display** run by a competent organisation - it's safer and not many garden fireworks parties will feature over £100,000 worth of fireworks! If you will be having your own firework party make sure you do so in a **safe place and have enough room to get to and from your fireworks** while the display is going on.

Sparklers are often thought of as harmless but they **burn at very high temperatures** and can easily cause injuries. Make sure that **everyone handling sparklers wears gloves** and never give them to children under five. They must be held at arms length while being lit and must not be waved about close to other people. **Keep a full bucket of water handy** for any emergencies and for disposing of used sparklers.

If you are having a **bonfire**, **don't be tempted to use petrol or paraffin to light the fire**. To avoid injuries from explosion or poisonous fumes, **don't burn dangerous rubbish such as foam-filled furniture, rubber, aerosols, tins of paint, pressurised gas cylinders etc.**

Please be **considerate of your neighbours** and **don't set fireworks off late at night**.

Pets get very frightened of fireworks night too, so remember to keep your pets indoors.

Why not send any pictures you take in to Linkup and share your experience of it with other readers? Send them in to the Editor at Ty Cennydd, Castle Street, Caerphilly - we'll offer a prize for the best printed.

1. **Plan your firework display to make it safe and enjoyable.**
2. **Keep fireworks in a closed box and use them one at a time.**
3. **Read and follow the instructions on each firework.**
4. **Keep naked flames, including cigarettes, away from fireworks.**
5. **Light the firework at arm's length with a taper and stand well back.**
6. **Never return to a firework once it has been lit.**
7. **Don't put fireworks in pockets and never throw them.**
8. **Direct any rocket fireworks well away from spectators.**
9. **Make sure that the fire is out and surroundings are made safe before leaving.**
10. **Only buy fireworks marked BS7114**

Have a safe and enjoyable November 5th!



Need rehousing? Then be an early bird...

The fortnightly Select a Home advert is available on the United Welsh website or can be sent to you via email. So if you want to be an early bird and be one of the first to see what vacancies are available, go to the website at www.uwha.co.uk or give your e-mail address to United Welsh and they'll e-mail the advert directly to you.

Noticeboard

united
welsh

How would you like your

...in large print or on audio tape?



Because the majority of United Welsh tenants speak and read English as their first language it make sense for the papers they produce to be printed in English as a rule.

If it is difficult for you to read or understand the existing prints and would prefer to have documents you can understand or read more easily, in large print, for example, as an audio tape or in another language, you can ask United Welsh

presented?

to help you. They are able to provide information in other formats, including large print, audio tape or other languages.

For more information please contact United Welsh on 029 20 858100 or e-mail tellmemore@uwha.co.uk.

...yn Gymraeg?

Hoffech chi ddarllen Linkup yn Gymraeg?

Rydym yn gwybod y buasai rhai ohonoch chwi yn hoffi derbyn Linkup trwy'r Gymraeg. Dymunwn ninnau gynhyrchu argraffiadau i'r dyfodol yn Gymraeg. Os buasai'n well gennych dderbyn Linkup Cymraeg, cyslltwch a David Williams, os gwelwch yn dda, ar 029 20858166 neu ar dwilliams@uwha.co.uk er mwyn cael eich enw ar y rhestr cylchrediad. Buasai e'n falch iawn o glywed oddi wrthyhych os fuasech chi'n fodlon helpu i gynhyrchu fersiwn Cymraeg.

Would you like to be able to read Linkup in Welsh?

We know some of you would like to receive Linkup in Welsh and we'd like to reproduce future editions in Welsh. If you would prefer a Welsh version of Linkup please contact David Williams on 029 20 858166 or at dwilliams@uwha.co.uk to be added to a circulation list. He would especially like to hear from you if you would be willing to help to produce a Welsh version.

Have you received your questionnaire?

You should have received a questionnaire from the United Welsh Development Team with this Linkup. If you don't get one with your copy, contact one of the Customer Service Advisors and they'll arrange to have one to send to you.



Sue Phillips

United Welsh are mourning the sad death of Sue Phillips who died in September after a long battle with cancer. Many of you will have been familiar with Sue's voice on the phone as a Customer Service Advisor.

Memories of Sue's display of indomitable spirit at the Race for Life in June this year, as reported in the Summer Linkup, will be particularly cherished by many of the United Welsh staff who took part with her. Always helpful, more often than not cheerful, Sue will be sadly missed by staff and tenants alike.

Is this up your street?

United Welsh is looking for a tenant who is enthusiastic about improving the Association's services, is confident enough to play an active part in discussions and can commit a morning once every two months.

The Service Improvement Steering Group, which reviews and monitors whether services improve as a result of changes made, needs a tenant member.

Training and support for anybody wanting to develop into the role is on offer, so no previous experience or in-depth knowledge is needed.

If you are interested, contact Nia Roblin on 029 20 858131 or by e-mail on nroblin@uwha.co.uk for more information and an application pack.