

Linkup

AUTUMN 2007



LINKUP CIRCULATION 3,100

A newsletter for and by United Welsh tenants

Over 170 tenants found out everything they ever wanted to know about United Welsh and v4t at a fun packed event in July. One tenant said...



“...thank you for a great day and...”



...it's good to be a United Welsh tenant!”

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Carbon monoxide.....

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.



Please
don't take
any risks –
get it checked

...the silent killer.



Do you wonder if anyone is listening to your opinions?



If so, you should consider joining the Hundred Club and be one of the hundred or so members regularly asked your opinion directly by the people making decisions which affect you and your home.

The Hundred Club is a new way for United Welsh to consult with tenants. Developed with voice4tenants, the Club gives members the chance to:

- Take part in quarterly consultations where your opinion is asked on a range of subjects being developed or reviewed by United Welsh managers.
- See the results, based on your replies, published in Linkup, The Focus and on the Internet.

- Get individual more detailed feedback on the results direct from the manager who asked your opinion.
- Just by taking part in consultations you can collect points which can be exchanged for prizes.

Interested? You can find out more and get an application pack by ringing the freephone number or by e-mailing tellmemore@uwha.co.uk or by asking your housing officer. Hurry though, there are only a limited number of places.

When you join you'll have the choice of contact by post, phone, e-mail or text. The only qualification you need is to live in a United Welsh home and you can cancel your membership at any time.



Your last chance to win £500!

Help United Welsh to improve their services to you by returning the questionnaire and you can be in with a chance to win a first prize of £500 or five runners up prizes of £100.

United Welsh recently sent out a questionnaire to all tenants asking for your help to improve services. The closing date was the 10th September but due to the recent problems with the postal service they have extended the deadline to the 24th September 2007.

Are you getting as much from United Welsh as you could be? Could they do more to help you? Let them know what other services you would like to have provided.

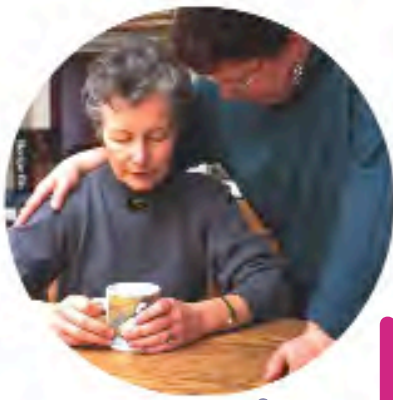
Did you know that in the last 12 months United Welsh have?

- Introduced a free-phone service 0800 294 0195
- Introduced a text messaging for rent balances and repairs



- Developed a cost effective home contents insurance package with Royal Sun Alliance. Luke Michell, Area Housing Manager, told Linkup: "We are also looking to develop our 5 Star Loyalty Scheme further, so the more we know about what our tenants want, the more we can help!" "We will pay close attention to what people say, using responses to understand what's relevant to tenants and their families and how we can improve our services." "Any information we receive will be kept safe and secure, it will not be shared with any other companies."

If you have misplaced your questionnaire or you have recently changed telephone number please call United Welsh on free-phone 0800 294 0195 and ask to speak to a Customer Services Advisor for your records to be updated.



Are you worried about legal problems?



Need help with legal problems? You may qualify for free legal advice through Community Legal Services Direct.

Community Legal Services (CLS) Direct gives independent confidential advice over the phone to people who live on a low income or benefits.

The service is funded by the government so it's provided free. If you qualify for legal aid, you can get advice about debt, benefits and tax credits, education, employment and housing problems. The helpline number is 0845 345 4 345.

If you have Internet access, you can see whether you are eligible by using the on-line calculator on the service website at www.clsdirect.org.uk - the website also has lots of information leaflets about common legal problems which can be read on-line or



downloaded free by anybody, whether you qualify for legal aid or not. The leaflets explain the law and help you get the right advice.

The CLS Direct website also has general information and legal factsheets available in Welsh, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish and

Urdu and the Community Legal Service leaflets are also available in Braille or on audiotape.

Calls to the helpline are charged at local rate (mobile charges vary) but if you are worried about the cost you can ask Community Legal Services Direct to call you back. The helpline also offers a translation service for callers who prefer to use a language other than English.

Deaf or hard-of-hearing callers can contact the Service using Typetalk on 18001 0845 345 4 345.

There is only one number that you need...



Community Legal Service



0845 345 4 345
www.clsdirect.org.uk

United Welsh delivers for its tenants



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

“The report is clear recognition of all the hard work done by staff... we also recognise that there is still work to be done.”

Tony Whittaker, Chief Executive of United Welsh

United Welsh is delivering good quality services for its 3,600 tenants, according to a recently published inspection report by the Auditor General for Wales. The organisation was found to demonstrate a range of strong capabilities and examples of good practice in the provision of housing services for its tenants.

The inspection report, carried out by the Wales Audit Office, found that United Welsh is providing services that successfully meet the needs of its tenants.

Out of the eight areas evaluated during the inspection, two were deemed excellent, three good and three satisfactory. In addition, United Welsh was commended for its strong corporate and strategic capabilities, along with demonstrating good practice in a range of key areas. The results provide further evidence of the organisation's commitment to customer focus and the importance of placing the tenant at the centre of everything that is done.

The provision of services for people with support needs was singled out for particular praise, receiving an 'excellent' rating. This was accompanied by the rents service, also awarded top marks.

“United Welsh is committed to providing our tenants with secure and comfortable accommodation where they will want to live now and in the future.”

Tony Whittaker, Chief Executive of United Welsh, said: “We welcome the findings of the Wales Audit Office inspection. The report is clear recognition of all the hard work done by staff. Although the findings outline some real positives, we also recognise that there is still work to be done.

“United Welsh is committed to providing our tenants with secure and comfortable accommodation where they will want to live now and in the future.”

“We are clearly heading in the right direction and by working even closer with tenants further improvements can be made.”

“The report outlines a number of recommendations, many of which have already been implemented. The remaining issues will be addressed in close partnership with tenants to ensure that services develop to meet changing customer needs.”

If you would like to view the full inspection report it is available to download on the Wales Audit Office website – www.wao.gov.uk



Carnival time!

The Annual Senghenydd Carnival attracted hundreds of visitors again this year on one of the only sunny weekends in July.

Carnival floats, fancy dress, live music, games, face painting, novelty and food stalls helped keep visitors entertained all day.

Above: Roger Dafydd and Wendy Griffin, Community Participation Officer busy talking to some of the many visitors to the stand.



Rain didn't stop play in Dinas

Dinas United Tenants' Association (DUTA) held their annual Fun Day in August at Caerleon Road, Dinas Powys.

Despite the heavy rain families from the estate braved the weather and enjoyed a FREE programme of events including, a children's entertainer, face painting, t-shirt printing and African drumming. Even the adults got a pampering with free sessions of Indian head massage. More than 30 children took part in the Teddy Bear's picnic and everyone got a prize.

Assembly Member Jane Hutt turned up to support the event and congratulated the tenants' association on their efforts to make this annual event so successful.

Ann Pethers, Vice Chair of the tenants' association said: "Considering the weather it went very well and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves. I'd like to thank Doreen Dix, April Deacon and Mark and Marilyn Watkins who worked tirelessly all day to make the event such a success."

Below: Jane Hutt AM watching the face painting



Tenants at Kenneth Treasure Court in St Mellons, Cardiff held a party in the summer to celebrate their new garden make-over and invited family and friends to join them.

Pat Collins, Scheme Manager said: "Everyone helped to organise the party and we were delighted that so many relatives could join us, especially the grandchildren, which made it a very lively afternoon!"



Children's entertainers kept the children busy with games, balloons and face painting. Even some of the adults got involved and had their faces painted which added to the party atmosphere.

United Welsh Chief Executive Tony Whittaker, pictured above talking to



Mervyn Jones about the new garden, called in to join the party and said: "It was great to see all the children, parents and grandparents together enjoying themselves. It was a really great idea and the tenants worked hard to achieve it. I felt tempted to have my face painted as well, BUT I had a meeting to go to".

Allie Skea, a tenant at Coed Uchel, the United Welsh Living+ scheme in Gilwern, missed her grandson's wedding in Canada earlier this year because she wasn't well enough to travel.

But thanks to a computer installed for the use of all tenants at the scheme she's been able to see the photographs of the big day over the Internet.

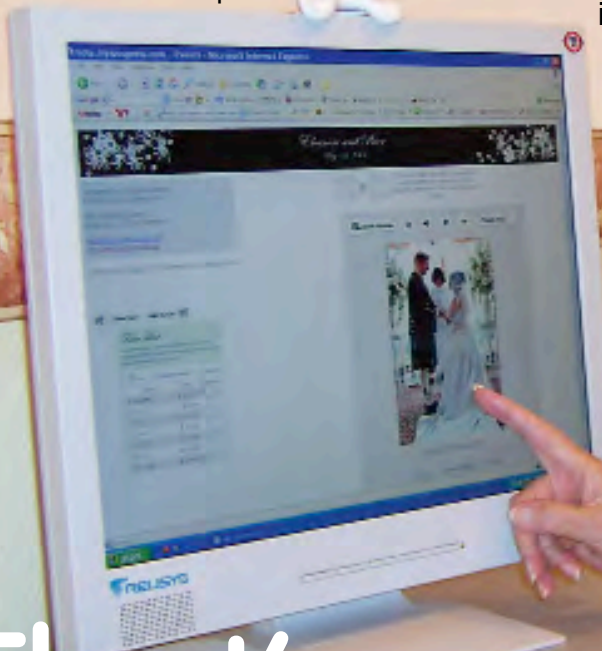
"We tried to set up a

webcam link on the day of the wedding so I could watch the ceremony but the link their end wasn't working," said Allie. "It was disappointing but the next best thing was being able to see the photographs online."

Allie is one of a number of tenants at Coed Uchel learning how to use the computer with support from the United Welsh Community Services team. Allie said: "I've just sent my first email to my daughter in Canada. She will be shocked and surprised

that I've been able to do it and I'm looking forward to contacting more members of my family.

The computer at Coed Uchel is one of twelve computers installed at Living+ schemes under the Computers In Sheltered Schemes (CISS) project and gives free access to the Internet.



**Allie Skea
on-line
with family
in Canada**

That's my grandson!



The joint United Welsh and v4t AGM on the 19th July was well attended, and all agreed, the...



...event was a huge success!

Tenants have labelled United Welsh's annual event a great success. Held at the Village Hotel in Cardiff on 19th July, over 170 tenants turned out to find out more about United Welsh and v4t and have some fun!

The event called 'Everything you wanted to know about...' was intended to raise awareness of all the work that is being done by United Welsh and v4t and also provide the opportunity for tenants to meet staff and contractors.

A range of exhibitions were on show to keep tenants fully informed and ensure that they get the best out of United Welsh and their v4t membership. Some of the exhibitions included:

- Planned maintenance programmes – including kitchen replacements

- How to become a home-owner
- Making your home more environmentally friendly
- Meet v4t
- Meet the Supported Housing Team

There was also plenty of fun to be had in the form of a quiz, head massages, exercise classes, and a computer package to design your own kitchen!

The prize for the highest scoring quiz

entry went to K Williams of Ebbw Vale, who won a DVD player. Congratulations Mrs Williams

As part of the day United Welsh and v4t also

“ Nicely organised with a very friendly atmosphere... ”

held their individual AGM's. Feedback from tenants has been very positive with a range of suggestions for developing the event next year. One satisfied tenant said: "I found the day very interesting and enlightening. Well worth the journey down. The staff members were so helpful, look forward to next year."

“ It has been a very enjoyable day, the food was first class and the presentations excellent. The staff were helpful and friendly. ”



THE SNOWDON CHALLENGE, OR, Blisters of Glory

United Welsh tenant, Rhys Llewellyn-Williams recently joined other wheelchair users and teams of their friends to race each other up Snowdon to raise money for charity. Rhys wrote in to tell us about the experience.

"The event was a massive success with all 12 teams who started reaching the summit. I am very proud to say that my team won the event. We got from the start line in Llanberris up to the very top and back down in exactly 3 hours!

Our nearest rivals were the team that won this event for the last three years running (when it was held in the Lake District). Jonny Haigh and his team, mostly made up of marines and paratroopers, had a custom made wheelchair donated to them by RGK - but we still beat them by 30 minutes, which is testament to the preparation and training we put in in the months leading up to the event... and it's not



all about fitness, either. The death-defying insane speed that we ran down the mountain with gave us the winning edge and gave me the best adrenaline rush since I broke my neck (six years ago whilst mountain biking). One of the checkpoint stewards claimed I was bouncing 10 inches out of the seat as we flew past him. We almost came a

cropper a few times and our catchphrase for the rest of the day was "blisters of glory, boys!"

The wheelchair took an absolute battering too, one of the wheels is so buckled it looks like the brim of a cowboy's hat. It now rubs against the frame and won't do a full revolution. Other chairs took a worse hiding, though. Jonny Haigh's custom made chair (with disc brakes & independent suspension on the rear wheels, no less) failed when the front wheel snapped off on the descent, and another guy's chair also snapped on the descent forcing him to catch the train the rest of the way down."

We'll be returning to Snowdonia next year to defend our title and to hopefully break the 3 hour mark too. My team has raised £1,800 in sponsorship so far, and it is hoped around £30,000 will be raised by the event, organised by the Back-Up Trust.



The Back-Up Trust is a national charity that supports people; young or old with spinal cord injury. If you would like to make a contribution to the campaign contact the Back-Up trust on 020 8875 1805 or donate online by visiting www.backuptrust.org.uk/donate_now.html

Do you live in Blaenau Gwent and have a spare room in your home? Would you be willing to offer it to a young person in need? If so, then you could make a real difference to a local teenager's life.

The children's charity NCH, in partnership with Blaenau Gwent Housing Services and Social Services, wants to recruit people who can provide good quality accommodation and a fresh start for young people.

The aim is to develop an approved lodgings scheme, using resources available within the local community that will reduce the need for vulnerable young people to be placed in bed and breakfast or other

unsuitable accommodation, and which will help in the overall reduction of homelessness in Blaenau Gwent.

Katrina Booth – NCH Supported Lodgings Development Worker said "In the borough of Blaenau Gwent we have young people aged between 16 - 21yrs, who, through no fault of their own, have nowhere to live."

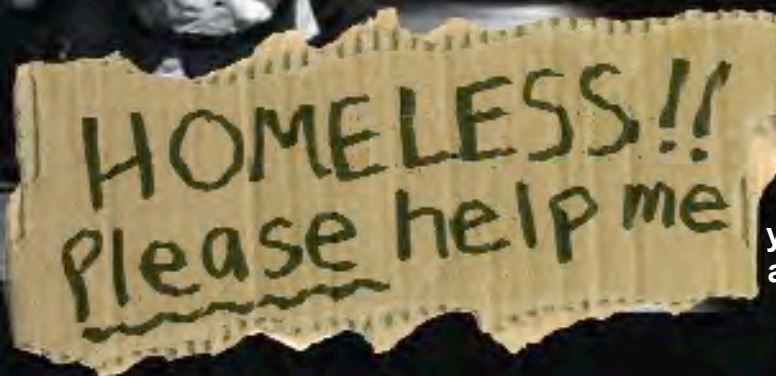
"NCH Children's Charity supports these vulnerable young people facing challenges and difficulties in their lives. The organisation is currently looking for people who may have a spare room, and who are able to provide accommodation as supported lodgings providers. "

If you have a spare room, and have an interest in helping people, you could make a difference to a young person's life.

Personal qualities are more important than your circumstances. Excellent support and a financial incentive are offered. If you can help please contact NCH Network for further information. Telephone: 01495 311113.



United Welsh works closely with NCH in providing supported housing and they are happy for tenants in the Blaenau Gwent area to take part in this scheme. Please let your housing officer know if you are taking part.



They're still out there listening!

The Senior Managers of United Welsh will still be on the road this autumn visiting estates and schemes to talk to residents and check on local conditions. There are more visits to come yet this year.



If you would like to meet with the Senior Managers during their visits to discuss a particular issue, please contact United Welsh with your name, address and phone number as well as brief details of your enquiry and an appointment will be made for you.

- **16th October** They will be at sites in Cardiff at Caerphilly Road, Ifor Jones Court, Penylan Road, St Teilo's Court, Almond Drive, Clos y Ffynon and Clos y Celyn.
- **17th October** Visits will be to Kennilworth Court, Llandaf, Llandaff North, Whitchurch, Cefn Onn Court and Kenneth Treasure Court.
- **19th October** They will visit Dinas Powys, Grangetown and Butetown.



ASK ALF



We have had a very disappointing Summer this year for gardens but with gardening we have to keep looking forward. So, here are some tips to ensure our Spring gardens look their best.

One weed left in the garden now could produce as many as 100 new ones, so weeding at this time of the year is very important.

Prune your climbers, trees and shrubs which have finished flowering, This will give them a new lease of life in the Spring, though you should never prune below the lowest leaf on a branch or this could prevent new growth.

Mow the lawn for the last time this year at the end of September – phew... a rest from that backbreaking work for a few months.

Pull up plants that will not come back next year (annuals) and trim the perennials, e.g. lavender/ivy, remove the dead flower heads and about a third of the stems.

Plants such as pelargonium (geraniums) can be over-wintered in a greenhouse or on a windowsill in the house. In the Spring you can take cuttings and produce lots of new plants.

And now for the pleasurable jobs – planting ready for spring. The end of September or beginning of October is a good time to get bulbs planted



for a colourful display in Spring.

They can be planted in the garden border, or in pots, hanging basket or window boxes – the choice is yours. As a general rule, bulbs should be planted three times their depth in soil. There are many types of bulbs to choose from - tulips, daffodils, narcissi, crocuses to name a few.



And don't forget about your garden ornaments! We're not all frost-proof, so start thinking now about where you can keep us over the coming winter – treat us well and we'll be bright and shining for you again in the Spring!

In the summer edition of Linkup, we invited you to send us your ideas for re-using, recycling or protecting the environment. The editorial board has selected the idea sent in by Doreen of Dinas Powys for this edition's star prize of £25 plus a choice of recycling equipment.

Doreen's idea is for recycling plastic drinks bottles: Cut large firm plastic bottles in half and use the bottom part as storage containers for your shed. They

are useful for nails, screws, paint brushes etc. Cling film or foil can be used as a lid if you need one and you really want to get flash, you can use coloured sticky covering to decorate them.

We had another idea along similar lines from Patsy of Ystrad Mynach which uses the other half of the bottle: Put a couple of small holes in the bottle cap and cut off base. Push the neck end into the soil in your plant pot and fill with water. It's particularly good if you're going away and won't be able to water – it will also gather rain water and continue to water plants with no effort! Photo on left shows plastic bottles being used as mini-cloches!



Re-use, Recycle, Repair!

Noticeboard

Two for one!

Each edition of Linkup now includes a **Perform** supplement – news and statistics you've said you'd like to read about and what's current with United Welsh and voice4tenants.



This edition also has an additional

Quality

supplement with news of repairs and replacements to United Welsh properties for the next two years.

If you miss any supplements you can get

copies by ringing 0800 294 0195 or by e-mailing



Is there something you want to know?

United Welsh collects a lot of information on how tenants feel about the services they provide, but because of limited space in the Linkup Supplement only the results on some services get reported regularly. If we gave you details of everything, Linkup would never fit through your letter box!

Do you want us to report on how tenants feel about a particular service provided by United Welsh? Would you like to know more about the services they provide? Contact the Editor on 0800 294 0195 or e-mail us at tellmemore@uwha.co.uk and we'll make sure your ideas go to the Editorial Board to be discussed for Linkup in the future. Better still, why not visit the Editorial Board and take part in that discussion?



voice4tenants Executive Committee meetings

The voice4tenants Executive Committee meetings for the coming quarter will be held in Caerphilly on Thursday 18th October, on Thursday 22nd November in Cardiff and on Thursday 13th December in Caerphilly.

OFFICE CLOSURE

The offices at Ty Cennydd and Walters Building will be closed on **Friday October 12th for Staff Conference**

If you need an emergency repair when the offices are closed, please contact the Emergency Repair Line at the number below.



(01495) 769624

Remember – this service is for emergencies only!

WINNERS OF THE REPAIR REPORT SLIPS DRAWS

FIRST NAME DRAWN WINS £50,
SECOND NAME WINS £25
AND THIRD WINS £10.

£50 - Mr R & Mrs S Norman, Dinas Powys
£25 - Mrs E S Evans, New Tredegar
£10 - Mr J J Flanagan, Aberbargoed

Contact United Welsh for free!

You can now phone United Welsh and it won't cost you a penny! From reporting repairs to commenting on Linkup, use the freephone number:

0800 294 0195