

SUMMER 2023

# CROMWOOD PEOPLE

Your tenant newsletter



How a new home and personalised support are helping to restore Habiba's zest for life

see page 10

5 Coming soon: tenant survey

6 Why David has reasons to sing

8 Top tips on preventing damp and mould

12 How Bill is starting to turn his life around

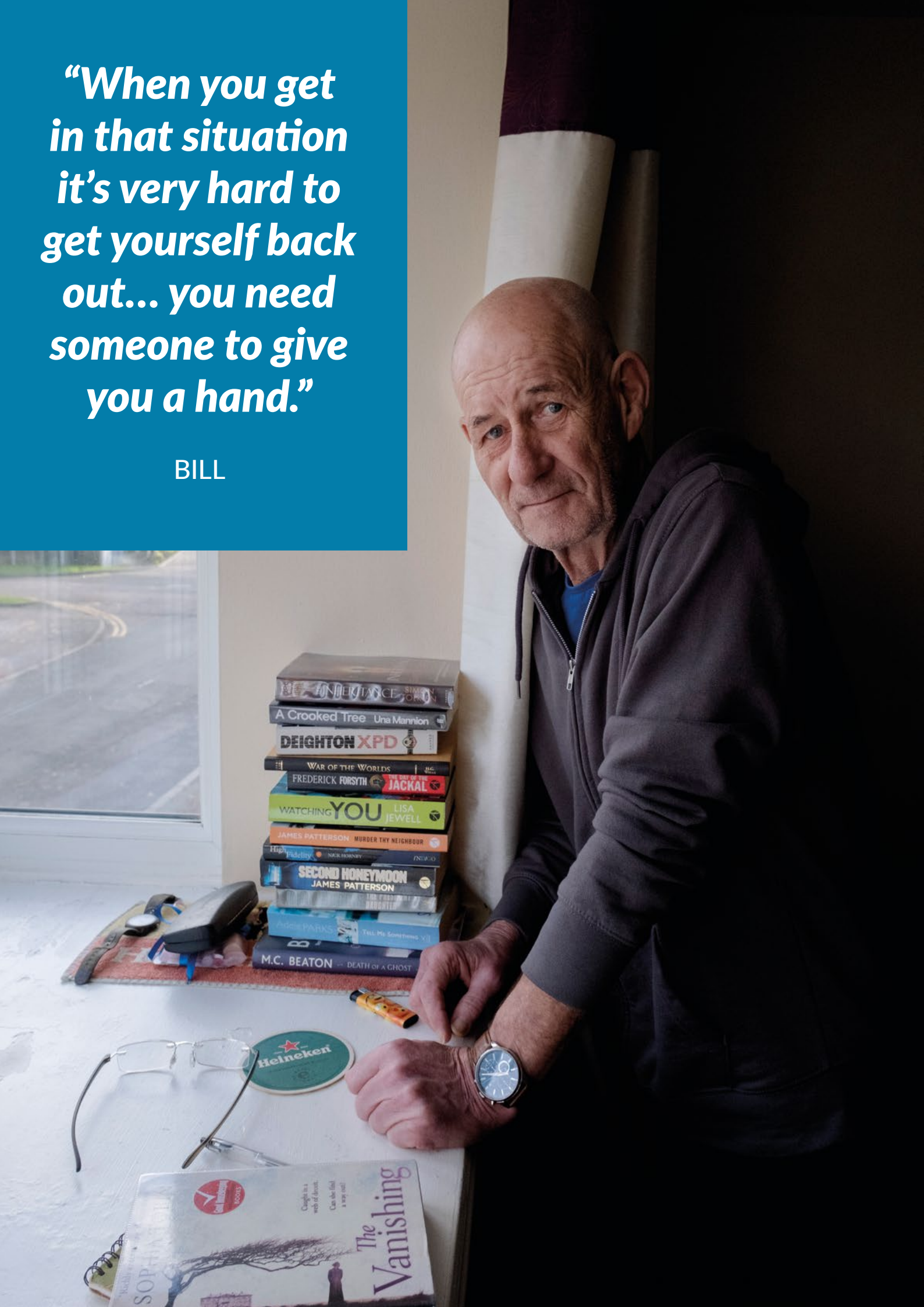
CROMWOOD  
HOUSING GROUP





**“When you get  
in that situation  
it’s very hard to  
get yourself back  
out... you need  
someone to give  
you a hand.”**

**BILL**



# Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter which we've launched for people living in Cromwood properties throughout London and Greater Manchester.

It's been an exciting and busy time over the last year as the organisation continues to grow and we acquire more homes and welcome new residents.

We have created the newsletter to help keep you informed about latest developments, find out more about our team and provide a platform to highlight inspirational stories from some of our tenants.

In this edition, Habiba, Bill, and David have kindly shared their journeys with us. They really sum up what Cromwood is all about and what drives us as an organisation: helping people to get their lives back on track.

We were incredibly proud to be named one of The Big Issue's 'top 100 Changemakers of 2023' earlier this year and we will continue to work hard to live up to that accolade.

With that in mind, we will soon be launching a survey to find out from you what we're doing well and how we can improve – find out more on page 5.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter. Please get in touch if you'd like to tell your story or have ideas for the next edition, which will be published later this year.

Best wishes,

**Moses Hirschler**

Chief Executive, Cromwood Housing Group



## Contents

About us	4
Coming soon: tenant survey	5
Why David has reasons to sing	6
Condensation, damp, and mould	8
Habiba's zest for life in her new palace	10
How Bill is starting to turn his life around	12
Key contacts	14



# About us

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*Cromwood was set up in 2002 to help address the serious shortage of social housing in London.*

Our vision is to provide decent and safe accommodation where our tenants can rest, receive support, and plan for the future.

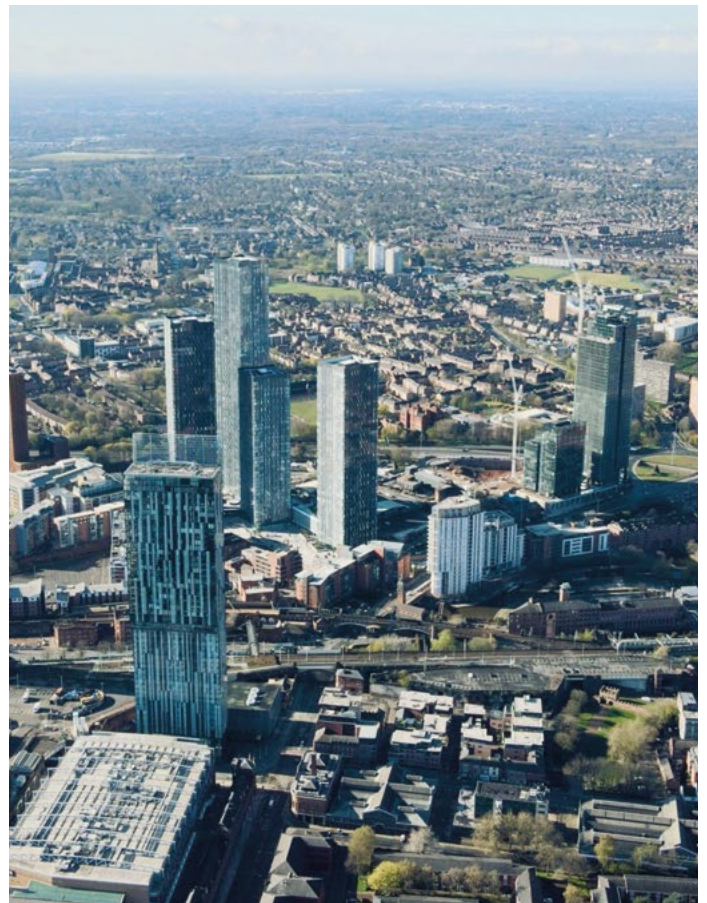
We are a private business, approved by the UK government to provide social housing. This means we are accountable to the housing regulator, our tenants, and our board of directors.

We currently house more than 3,000 people in London and Greater Manchester in properties we lease, manage or own.

As a mission-led business, we provide services that make a real difference to people's lives.

Strategic partners, such as the Greater London Authority, provide funding for new housing to tackle rough sleeping and house people fleeing domestic violence. Other organisations such as Solace and Thames Reach work with us to ensure that tenants get the support they need to maintain their tenancies and get back on their feet.

Over the coming years, we aim to increase the number of people we house and have an even greater impact in London and Greater Manchester. For us, success means high quality, affordable housing, strong partnerships, and good communication to help our business and our tenants move onwards and upwards.



# Coming soon – tenant survey



## *Have your say!*

Over the coming months, we'll be asking you to let us know what we're doing well and what we can do better.

**All tenants** will be invited to a complete short **tenant satisfaction survey** via email or text. It contains 12 multiple-choice questions on important issues such as whether you feel safe in your home, whether your property is well-maintained, and how we tackle problems and complaints.



This survey allows us to check whether we are managing our homes and neighbourhoods effectively. Please respond as soon as you can. It should only take a few minutes.

If you don't have access to a mobile phone or the internet or would struggle to take part for any other reason, please contact the number on the back of this newsletter. It's OK for a friend or relative to help you to complete the form.

In addition, we have asked an independent company to do a **separate telephone survey**.

The first survey will tell us if you're happy or unhappy about something; the telephone survey is your chance to tell us **why** you're happy or unhappy and what changes you'd like us to make.

If you're chosen to take part in the phone survey, you will be contacted, at random. **They will not ask you for your bank details or financial information.** If you are unsure about who has contacted you, please hang up and get in touch with us on 020 8826 2800.

We will publish the results of both surveys on our website and in our next newsletter.

Having a decent place to live isn't just about keeping warm and dry. When all the basics are taken care of, we can begin to set goals and create a happier, more secure future. So, please help us to help you.

Thank you for your time and support.

**Kevin Murphy**

**Strategic Director, Cromwood Housing Group**



## DAVID'S STORY:

**“I have what I want and what I need and I’m happy”**

*During lockdown, David was taken to a Croydon hotel where he felt isolated and uncared for. He explains why his Cromwood home has given him plenty of reasons to sing.*



David introduces himself as a singer and musician with a melodic burst from a George Michael track. "Keep it light, life is fun," he says.

He picked up his first guitar and pair of drumsticks at the age of 14 and says that music has kept him alive through two divorces, the death of both parents, and a period of homelessness that he still struggles to talk about. Sleeping with one eye open in Heathrow Airport was one thing, being bundled into the back of a taxi with no idea of where he was being taken during the coronavirus lockdown was another.

"It was bizarre," he says. "The airport was shutting due to the pandemic and they threw everybody out. I remember crying in the back of the taxi. It was ridiculously horrible." And it got worse.

David ended up in a hotel in the centre of Croydon at a time when lockdown rules meant that people were allowed outside for an hour's exercise a day. The father of two knew no-one in the area, felt as if no-one cared, and was beaten up in the hotel. "I was in prison, it was isolation city," he says. "I had a TV and shower but that was it."

All the things he loved - playing his guitar on the South Bank, going to the pub, and enjoying "lots and lots of music" - had been taken away. This man of mottoes and mantras had always said, *I am homeless, not hopeless*, but during his year in an area of Croydon which he describes as "a place you go past to get somewhere else", his mental health deteriorated.

"I'm a positive person but I was lost," he says. "It wasn't a good time in my life."

Then, the wheel of fortune spun in the opposite direction and he was offered a place in a Cromwood home. Once again, he found himself in the back of a taxi, but this time he was supported by a friendly worker from Thames Reach, which partners with Cromwood to provide housing support. When he arrived at his brand new accommodation, he signed the tenancy agreement on the spot.

He moved into his new flat on the day his mother died. "It was bitter-sweet, not a day I'll ever forget."



***"I have what I want  
and what I need  
and I'm happy.  
It is my security,  
it is home."***

Cromwood provides long-term, high quality, affordable accommodation where previously homeless people have all the security they need to start to rebuild their lives. David describes the journey from sleeping rough in Heathrow airport, to feeling unsafe in a Croydon hotel, to his new Cromwood home as "surreal".

It has given him a place to recover from a recent heart operation, the headspace to start thinking about writing his memoirs and somewhere to invite his children. And he can finally sleep with both eyes closed.

"It means more to me than I can possibly describe," he says. "It is peace of mind. I don't get any trouble here. I have what I want and what I need and I'm happy. It is my security, it is home." And, with that, he breaks into song.

# Condensation, damp and mould

*Cromwood maintenance manager, Mike Weiser, explains why early intervention is critical to addressing problems with damp and mould.*

It can start with sweating windows, a musty smell, and a feeling that the house never quite warms up, but over time condensation can develop into damp and mould that may damage your health, your belongings, and your home.

If problems arise (e.g. leaks, mould on the walls or around windows), please let us know immediately so that we can stop them from getting worse.

The best way to get help is to phone us and speak to one of the maintenance team. We will help as much as we can, as fast as we can.

**Please do not contact the local authority or pass messages through your housing support worker as this will cause delays.**



**SEE IT**



**REPORT IT**



**HELP US SORT IT**

**020 8826 2800**

Mon-Fri 9.30-17.00

*(during the winter, phone lines  
close at 3pm on Fridays)*

**Maintenance@Cromwood.co.uk**

## MEET THE TEAM



**Mike Weiser**

Maintenance Manager

***‘We want to catch damp and mould early on, and tenants can help.’***

I joined Cromwood in 2018, first as a secretary in the office and then a year or two later I moved into maintenance. At that time, I was the only person dealing with maintenance for the organisation - taking calls, making sure we properly understood the issues, and then getting repair officers to deal with them. Now that we have more than 1,000 properties, there's no way I could do it on my own!

I was made maintenance manager about a year ago, and so I guess I was good at my job! We have a team of three people in the maintenance office plus repair officers in south, west, and east London. This means that when we get a phone call about a problem and need more clarification, we can ask one of our repair officers to go and take a look so that we know exactly what needs to be done.

My team addresses everything from leaks to a tenant's oven not working. Condensation, damp and mould can be awful for tenants and expensive for us, as landlords, to treat with special plaster, anti-mould paint and, sometimes, insulation. The article opposite gives some more information on what we're doing to ensure we catch damp and mould early, and how tenants can help.



## Our responsibility

You have a right to live in a decent home.

Recent data from the English Housing Survey showed that 3% of social housing had serious problems with condensation and mould in at least one room; 5% had issues with heating. Homes built between 1981 and 1990 were most likely to have problems with heating.

As a responsible landlord, we aim to deal with damp and mould before they impact on your health or your ability to remain in your home. We will act on your complaints in a timely manner, keep in touch with you about progress, and do our best to ensure that the issues you've raised are fully resolved.

## Reasons for damp and mould

There are many reasons for damp and mould including the age and design of property and problems with heating. These problems can be complex and long-running. The three main reasons for damp and mould are:

- insufficient ventilation
- leaks
- structural problems

If you have extractor fans that aren't working properly or notice signs of damp or mould in your property, please contact us immediately. Don't wait for it to get worse and don't worry that you'll be blamed. All issues will be taken seriously.

## Prevention is better than cure

We plan to invest in a major insulation programme to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. Surveyors will be appointed later this year. We will let you know when we need to access your property and what to expect in due course.

We can also offer tips on avoiding condensation in ways that don't cost a penny (see our top 10 tips, above right). For example, it helps to run the cold water first when you're filling the bath and to dry laundry on a clothes horse in a well-ventilated room. We can also show you how to switch your heating controls from the winter to the summer setting and back again. When in doubt, talk to us.

## How you can help

Our repair officers are based in different parts of the city so that they can respond quickly. We aim to make appointments that are convenient for you. Have your phone to hand when you're expecting a visit as we might need to ring you to gain access to your home. **If you need to change an appointment, please get in touch as soon as you can.**

## Top 10 tips

Small acts can make a huge difference and might even save you money. Here are our top tips:

1. Leave gaps between the furniture and walls so that air can circulate freely
2. Shower with the bathroom door closed
3. Dry clothes outside if possible
4. Avoid drying clothes on radiators
5. Cook with pan lids on and with the kitchen door closed
6. Ventilate your property by opening windows or vents daily, even if it's just for 5 minutes at key points in the day
7. Wipe excess water from doors, windows, and windowsills as soon as you can
8. Don't overheat or underheat your home. The Energy Saving Trust recommends that you keep your home at a minimum of 15C
9. Check radiators and extractor fans are working properly and let us know if there are any cold spots
10. Check vents from time to time and let us know if they are blocked

## Further advice

We know that lots of people reduced their energy consumption over winter due to high costs of gas and electricity and cost of living increases. If you have access to the internet, you can sign up to the Energy Saving Trust's monthly newsletter via [est.org.uk](http://est.org.uk) for tips on how to save money in your home. There is also lots of advice about dealing with condensation and mould on our website, [cromwood.co.uk](http://cromwood.co.uk).

## OUT OF HOURS

For emergency help outside normal office hours, contact:

Maintenance emergency (out of hours): 0208 066 5388

Gas (Transco): 0800 111 999

## HABIBA'S STORY:

**“It’s not just a roof over my head,  
it’s my home”**

*Habiba’s new home has helped restore her humanity  
and zest for life after months of sleeping in her car  
and suffering from depression.*





Habiba had lived in her family home for 25 years until, one day in 2020, her brother told her that she had to be out of the house by midnight. At 50 years old, she became homeless overnight.

Habiba began sleeping in her car, then rented a garage to stay in, before moving between different friends' houses each week. She applied to over one hundred places for housing, but no one was able to help her. "I was so desperate," she says. As time went by, her physical and mental health began to deteriorate – she got pneumonia and depression took hold: "I felt helpless... Some days I wished I was dead. I had hit rock bottom."

In November 2021, Habiba was in hospital with Covid when she received a call from Cromwood Housing. They had read her application and she was eligible for the one-bed scheme run by Cromwood Housing and Thames Reach. These were properties across London that Cromwood owned, being offered to rough sleepers who were considered suitable for independent living, with some initial floating support. Once Habiba had recovered, she moved into her new home in West Drayton in December 2021. "I don't think there are enough words for me to describe what it felt like to have my own place. It was like my palace," she says.

Cromwood has over 300 properties which are used to house rough sleepers. Tenants are supported by Thames Reach, a charity that supports homeless and vulnerable people in London to find decent homes, and provides advice and assistance that is personalised for their specific needs. Habiba initially didn't even have essentials like a duvet or pillows, so she was supported with the necessities to help her get back on her feet: "I wasn't expecting this... they went beyond what they needed to. I couldn't have asked for more."

For Habiba, having a home once again has restored her sense of self. "I had lost the joy of living, I didn't consider myself a human. Having a warm place where I can sleep and eat properly has given me my dignity, my humanity, my self respect back." She is looking forward to gradually building back her health in order to start working again.

"It's not just a roof over my head, it's my home."



**“ Having a warm place where I can sleep and eat properly has given me my dignity, my humanity, my self respect back. ”**



## **BILL'S STORY:**

**“It was life changing,  
I’m a lot happier”**

*In our new series of stories about Cromwood’s tenants, we meet former rough sleeper Bill, now the proud occupant of a flat where he can start to rebuild his life, see his grandchildren and plan a brighter future.*



*One of Bill's favourite spots to walk, along the River Wandle close to his home.*



Just over two years ago, 66-year-old Bill was living on the streets. He is an alcoholic and suffers from severe back problems, and didn't have enough money to get out of the vicious cycle he found himself in: "When you get in that situation it's very hard to get yourself back out... you need someone to give you a hand."

After living in temporary and then shared accommodation, Bill was given the opportunity to have a place of his own when he was assessed as being eligible for the GLA-funded scheme run by Cromwood Housing and Thames Reach. Cromwood has purchased one-bed properties throughout London to offer to rough sleepers who have gone through the GLA Clearing House and considered to be suitable for independent living with some initial floating support.

Bill was offered a flat in Carshalton, a town in south London, right by the River Wandle. "Two minutes outside your front door you wouldn't believe you were in London," he says. It's even in the same area that he grew up in, so Bill knows the people and the place well – his childhood home is just a 20 minute walk away.

And it's made a big difference - both to Bill's daily life and to his outlook. "It was life changing, I'm a hell of a lot happier," he says.

Since having a space to call home, Bill's drinking has significantly reduced, and he keeps the flat spick-and-span – no washing in the sink or dirty clothes lying around. "I'm very proud of my place," he says. And he also enjoys having his children and grandchildren over to visit.

Cromwood has been able to purchase over 300 properties in the last two years which have been used to house rough sleepers. The tenants are supported by Thames Reach to make sure the tenancy is sustained by providing advice and assistance individually tailored for each tenant.

As for Bill, over the next few months he's planning to spruce up his flat with his son's help – to put down some new flooring and "splash a bit of paint around". The future looks bright, in more ways than one!



**“They’ve been absolutely super, you couldn’t wish for a better landlord.”**

He knows that he can count on ongoing support while he's getting back on his feet – and he's grateful that Cromwood and Thames Reach are only a phone call away.

“If I've ever got any problems, it's just a call and there's always someone round. They've been absolutely super, you couldn't wish for a better landlord.”

# Key contacts

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**London office:**  
020 8826 2800



**Manchester office:**  
0161 241 1341



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[maintenance@cromwood.co.uk](mailto:maintenance@cromwood.co.uk)




[complaints@cromwood.co.uk](mailto:complaints@cromwood.co.uk)



[rents@cromwood.co.uk](mailto:rents@cromwood.co.uk)





***“I don’t think there are enough words for me to describe what it felt like to have my own place. It was like my palace.”***

HABIBA

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