

Spring 2009

Housing NEWS

Tenant's Newsletter from Ashford Borough Council

**Drumming
up fun...**
in South Willesborough



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



ashford borough
tenants forum

inside:

- Bonjour Stanhope!
- The National Conversation
- Holy Days and Holidays
- Garages for rent
- Heathside's Area Plan
- Spring Wordsearch

Ashford
best placed in Britain



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

www.ashford.gov.uk

council contacts

Housing Services Team

Tel: 01233 330688
Email: housing@ashford.gov.uk
Repairs Hotline: 01233 330366

Civic Centre

Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent
TN23 1PL

Open: 9am – 5pm Monday
to Thursday
9am – 4.30pm Friday

Tel: 01233 331111
Typetalk: 01233 330744

Lines Open:
8.30am-5.30pm Monday
to Thursday
8.30am-5.30pm Friday

Out of Hours/Emergency:
01233 629911

24 Hour Payment Line:
01233 330625

Benefit Fraud Hotline:
0800 026245

The Ashford Gateway Centre

14 Park Mall, Ashford,
Kent TN24 8RY

Tel: 08458 247247
Typetalk: 08458 247905
Fax: 01233 638012

Ashford Borough Tenants Forum: TFG@ashford.gov.uk

Housing News

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editor's note

We are told that spring is on the way, but with snow all around as I write this (in February) it still feels a long way off!

In this issue of Housing News we will be reporting about some changes in the Housing Department which we hope will lead to an improved service. Please let us know either way as all feedback is useful.

Some of you have been on training courses recently and we hear from you about your experiences and new skills learned.

We are also hoping to resurrect the successful South East Kent Tenants Conference, which will probably take place in Maidstone this September. It promises to be an interesting mix of interactive idea sharing and informed debate. Places will be limited so early booking will be recommended once the date is announced. Watch this space for more information.

New tenants may be wondering about the 'You said we did' logo'. For those of you that don't know what this means, we print this logo with certain articles and news items as a way to let you know that we've acted on your feedback and suggestions.

So keep the feedback coming and don't forget about Ashford Back Chat (see the back page for more).

Philippa Dale Editor



Philippa Dale



Pat Pearman



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Cover Picture: Youngsters try their hand at African drumming at the Swan Centre family fun day, in South Willesborough

If you know someone who is blind or partially sighted who would like to listen to Housing News on cassette or CD, then please contact the Editor on **01233 330365**.

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Assisted Decoration Scheme On Hold

The scheme to redecorate homes for the over 60s and disabled has been put on hold for new applicants.

The scheme was scaled back last November after the economic challenges facing the council meant there had to be a reduction in the available budget.

The programme gives people over 60 years of age and those in receipt of Disability Living Allowance assistance to redecorate their homes and anyone that signed up before 17th November, 2008, will still be eligible for help.

The cutbacks may also mean a more limited choice of decoration service with some longer waiting times but the Housing team will be working hard to keep the scheme going.

Spring Chicken

Housing News bagged an invite to a very special birthday party in January, as we joined friends, family and neighbours to celebrate Marylla Nightingale's 99th birthday!

Marylla, who has lived at the Little Hill sheltered housing scheme in St. Michaels for 12 years, thought she was attending a tenants meeting but instead found herself the guest of honour at a surprise party.

Marylla told us: "My mother was in the Daily Express when she reached 100 so maybe they'll be in touch next year!"

We're already looking forward to the party next year.

Many happy returns, Marylla.



Training Days

Hot off the press

Tenant newsletters will be getting a make over after members of the forum attended a recent training course about producing new look communications.

They spent some time comparing the national newspapers and their writing and layout styles to look at good practices for their own publications.

The course also showed how you can vary pages, articles and features to keep readers interested.

There was also a session about using columns and boxes for variety in the copy, as well as the use of photography and artwork, including the popular Microsoft Clipart.

You never know, we may have discovered the next Rupert Murdoch!! Watch this space.

Mediate, not meditate!

Resolving family disputes, dealing with arguments over boundary fences, trees and noisy neighbours are just some of the areas covered in a training course for mediation.

Three members of the Ashford Borough Tenants Forum have recently completed a 13 week course teaching them how to deal with a wide range of different situations that occur during neighbourhood disputes.

Pat Pearman said: "I came away with a lot more confidence, and now feel like we can start doing this for real and help people to resolve their problems in peaceful and productive way."

Four go to Canterbury

Four members of the Tenants Forum attended a skills session in Canterbury recently to learn how to make meetings more interesting and productive.

Here are some of the issues they covered:

- Always stick to the agenda**
This was seen as the most important rule and it helps to keep accurate minutes too
- Make sure everyone has a say**
Involving quieter members by allocating them jobs is a good way to encourage participation
- Don't allow talkative people to dominate discussions**
- Meeting manners**
Only one person to speak at a time
Don't talk when others are speaking

Pat Pearman told Housing News: "The tutor for the day, Ash, was really helpful and we came away with lots to think about. Hopefully this will be reflected in future meetings."



Terri (2nd from right) and Val (far right) go training in Canterbury

The National Conversation

Your chance to have your say about standards in social housing.


The **Tenant Services Authority**, the new regulator for homes owned by housing associations and co-ops, has launched their **National Conversation** campaign, aimed at getting tenants to help them set the standards for social housing.

From spring 2010 they are likely to be responsible for regulating local council's as well so this is relevant for all tenants and to Ashford Borough Council.

The National Conversation will be taking place all over England and they are also setting up **Local Conversations** to give as many people as possible the chance to have their views heard.

Local Conversations don't have to be formal and they could even be a group of tenants getting together over a cup of tea in somebody's home, or in a community centre.

To organise an event, you can order a pack from the Tenant Services Authority by calling **0845 230 7000** and you can find more information on their website, **www.nationalconversation.co.uk**



What's new in **Housing**

Change for good

Change is coming to your housing management team

From April 2009, every tenant will have a dedicated Area Manager who will be responsible with not only estate management or rent arrears but both. This will mean as a tenant you will have a one stop shop for your housing management enquires.

Your dedicated Area Manager will be responsible for a variety of housing management issues from viewings and

estate inspection (everyone is welcome on these) to assisting with debt and welfare advice for tenants who are experiencing financial difficulties resulting in rent arrears.

Further information will be available soon as to who will be covering which areas in the Borough, so keep your eyes peeled!

IT Update
Our new computer system, Arc House Plus, is now up and running. We'll still be on hand to answer all of your queries but please be patient if it takes us a little bit longer than usual while we adjust to the new system.

New Faces

The Housing team has recently welcomed some new faces as well as saying goodbye to a familiar one.

Housing Operations Manager, Nicholas Watkin, left the council in January and Rebecca Newman (pictured below) has taken over his team. Rebecca is now responsible for the Estate and Tenancy Management teams.

Oliver Samways joined Housing in September last year and works as a Housing Services Assistant in this busy team.

“Our team is the first point of contact for anyone with a housing query. We deal with all types of housing need, from waiting lists to rent queries, maintenance to repairs.

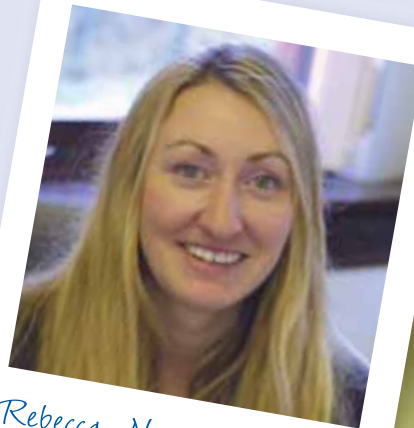
“The best thing about working here is the diversity – no two days are the same.”

In December last year, Colin Green joined the Housing Options Team as a Housing and Employment Advisor, working on the Trailblazer project to offer more help to people with housing enquiries.

“The Gateway is really important as it allows us to take our service out into the community, offering a wide range of help and advice to even more people.”

“I'll be working with other local authorities to share best practice and improve our services, so whether it's here or at the Gateway, it's always interesting to meet new people.”

From Housing News, we welcome all three of you to your new roles.



Rebecca Newman



Oliver Samways



Colin Green



Bonjour Stanhope!

Moat Housing organised a visit for 30 French students last November to see how UK construction practices differ from those across the Channel.

The students, aged between 17 and 18, are all studying Engineering in the sixth form at Lycée Pasteur, in Hénin-Beaumont near Lille.

The first stop on their tour was Denne's Construction

Skills Academy at Stanhope in Ashford, where they were welcomed with traditional English bacon and sausage sandwiches.

As part of the regeneration at Stanhope, the group saw timber-framed homes at various stages of construction. Brick and block construction is much less common in France so the students were keen to take souvenir samples of materials from the site.

Moat's sustainability manager, Caroline Field, who organised the visit, said:

"Moat is committed to supporting construction training projects and encouraging young people to consider careers in this field. All the staff involved really enjoyed sharing their enthusiasm for their projects with such motivated and enthusiastic young people."



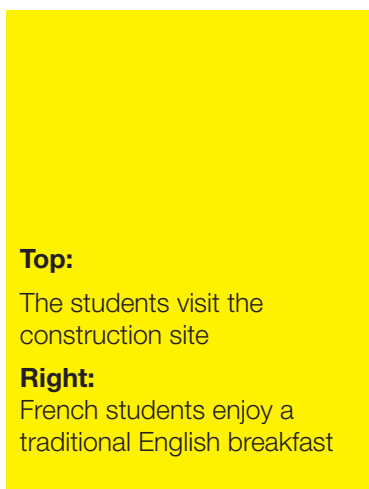
Housing Surgery News Surgery Success!

Thanks to the success of our housing surgeries, we have responded to your requests to add Tenterden Gateway and Oaks School to the programme.

The idea behind the scheme is to have regular sessions in schools and community centres around the borough where people can drop in to meet housing staff and ask any questions.

Unfortunately, the expanded programme will mean that the Area Managers will not be able to attend all of the surgeries quite as often; however, the Housing Team will continue to lead on surgeries and there will always be a representative on hand to deal with any queries.

More detail on the dates and venues will be available soon.



Top:

The students visit the construction site

Right:

French students enjoy a traditional English breakfast





Local Needs Housing

A joint project between Ashford Council, Brabourne Parish Council, Smeeth Parish Council and English Rural Housing Association sees the completion of eleven affordable homes for people with local connections to Brabourne or Smeeth.

The completion of the homes, off Calland in Smeeth, is the result of several years' hard work and determination that all began with a housing needs survey back in 2004.

These much needed homes not only provide accommodation for local people but help to sustain village life, enabling local people to stay or return to

the community where they have family and friends, using local facilities and services.

The development is made up of:

- Four 1 bedroom flats
- Four 2 bedroom houses, two of which are to rent
- Three 3 bedroom houses, two to rent and one for shared ownership

The homes are built to a high quality and they all meet the Eco Homes Very Good standard, with photovoltaic panels on the roofs to generate a proportion of the electricity for the home from solar energy.

Adding to their green credentials, the site was surveyed before so much as a brick was laid to look for any native wildlife. Slow worms and lizards were found and relocated to another site to preserve the local population.

More on the way

As well as this project at Smeeth, work has also started on six local needs homes at Stone in Oxney and planning permission has now been granted for local needs schemes in Rolvenden, Smerden and Charing with building work expected to begin later in the spring.

Several Parish Councils are working closely with a housing association and Ashford Borough Council to bring other schemes forward. Plans for schemes at Old Wives Lees in Chilham, Godmersham and Crundale (who are working on a joint scheme) have been submitted for approval. Meanwhile, Egerton is very close to the final stages of development.



For more information about Local Needs Housing, go to www.ashford.gov.uk/housing or call: Jennifer Shaw on 01233 330451

SWAN Centre Family Fun

Plans for a new Children's Centre, Sports Youth Club and Multi Use Games Area were given the public's seal of approval at a Family Fun Day held at the SWAN Centre in South Willesborough on 7 February.

The new centre is proposed to be built on the land adjacent to the SWAN centre and the plans went on show for members of the local community to make comments.

Ashford Borough Council, together with partners from SureStart, Salvation Army, SWAN Centre trust and Kent County Council, hosted the fun day which included lots of activities for children, from badge making, face painting, football skills, graffiti painting skills and an African drumming workshop.

We also saw the welcome return of the washing line for residents to add their comments and views.

Among the suggestions were calls for the new centre to have sex education for youngsters, day groups for single parents teaching cooking, first aid and healthy living, and a youth forum to allow users to air their ideas.

The planning application is due to be submitted in March and it is hoped construction may begin in Autumn this year.





Ashford Neighbourhood Walkabouts

**SPRING
2008/9**

As you will have read on page 4, Ashford Borough Council Area Managers are having a change around. Although this should not impact on the service you receive, and in particular the estate walkabouts, it will mean that the weekly walkabouts will fall into a three week cycle, which has yet to be finally sorted as this issue of the newsletter goes to print.

The timetable however continues barring accidents, and is set out below. As always if you would like to attend an inspection where you live, either just turn up, or to be on the safe side ring the Area Manager team on 01233 330200.

The Stanhope team remains unchanged (see below)

**Kingsnorth/ Shadoxhurst/
Great Chart**
23.03.09
2pm meeting at Stumble Lane
Kingsnorth

Godfrey Walk
30.03.09
2pm meeting by Trumpet House

Brookfield A
06.04.09
2pm meeting at the junction of
Beaver Lane and Cleves Way

Hothfield / Little Chart
13.04.09
2pm meeting at the school car
park

Brookfield B
20.04.09
2pm meeting at car park beside
Lewis Court

Brookfield C
27.04.08
2pm meeting at the junction of
Jemmett Road and Brookfield
Road

Tenants Choice / Revisits
04.05.09

Charing / Charing Heath
11.05.09
2pm meeting in layby at Moat
Park

Rothbrook (Kennington)
18.05.09
2pm meeting at car park behind
18-20 Dale Walk

Newtown Green
25.05.09
2pm meeting at the post office

**Chilham / Old Wives Lees /
Godmersham / Crundale /
Hastingleigh / Brook**
01.06.09
2pm telephone Duty Manager to
arrange meeting point

Twelve Acres
08.06.09
2pm meeting in the parking area
at Sotherton

**Repton Manor / Poet's
Corner**
15.06.09
2pm meeting at Norwood
Gardens by the pet shop

Tenterden
22.6.09
2pm meeting at car park by 60
Priory Way

South Willesborough
29.06.09
2pm meeting at Albion Place by
the bridge



**Andrew Brackley,
Tracy Homdon and
Naureen Ullah**

You can reach Andrew, Tracy
and Naureen on 01233 647396

**Andrew's routes:
Eastry Close, Sheldwich
Close, Lynsted Close,
Crundale Close and Sandling
Close**

Thursday 26 March
Thursday 23 April
Thursday 28 May
Thursday 18 June
All meeting points are at the
main entrance to Eastry Close
at 9.30am

Leaveland Close
Friday 27 March
Friday 24 April
Friday 29 May
Friday 19 June
All meeting points are at the
main entrance of Leaveland
Close at 9.30am

**Tracy's routes:
Bredgar Close**
Wednesday 8 April
Wednesday 13 May
Wednesday 10 June
Meeting at Bredgar Close at
9.30am

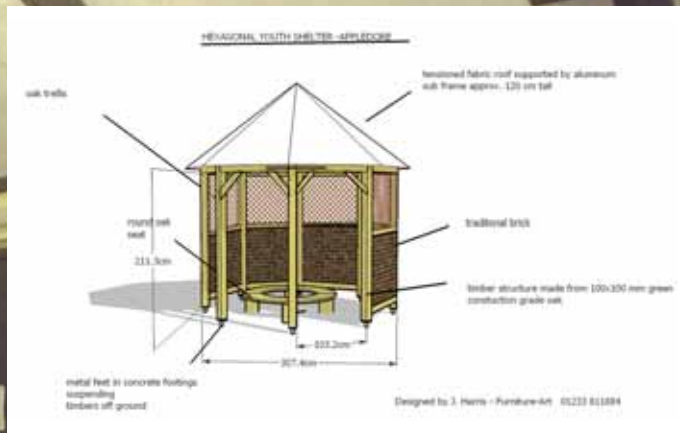
Luddenham Close
Friday 10 April
Friday 15 May
Friday 12 June
Meeting at Luddenham Close at
10.30am

**Naureen's routes:
Baddlesmere Close and
Frittenden Close**
Thursday 9 April
Monday 11 May
Tuesday 9 June

**Brenchley Close and
Kilindown Close**
Monday 27 April
Wednesday 20 May
Wednesday 17 June

**Otterden Close and
Speldhurst Close**
Friday 20 March
Wednesday 29 April
Friday 22 May
Tuesday 23 June

Newenden Close
Friday 24 April
Wednesday 13 May
Friday 12 June



Heathside Youth Shelter

More than a dozen young people from Appledore attended a workshop to share their views about the youth shelter after local designer, Jason Harris, put forward his suggested design.

The aim has been to create a shelter that will fit in to the rural environment and be well used thanks to the input from local young people. This will also finish the Heathside Area Plan on a positive note.

The final design has now been put forward for planning permission and local residents to be kept informed of progress.

Cleaning Contract

It has already been six months since the cleaning contract started so this is the ideal opportunity to give you some feedback on how the scheme is going.

We have received some feedback from residents about good and bad aspects of the service and all of these are shared with our contractors, Town & Country Cleaners.

Regular visits and the standard of cleaning are two of the concerns that have been expressed and we are working with Town & Country Cleaners to address this.

Town & Country Cleaners are keen to engage with residents, especially if they have any concerns about the service, and are happy to make home visits if required.

They are also keen to participate in a regular monitoring group with residents to ensure that any issues are raised and dealt with quickly.

If you want to get involved, please call Philippa Dale on 01233 330365 or email philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk

You can call Town & Country Cleaners on their freephone number 0800 3894825.

Garages

Do you want to save money on your car insurance and protect your car from vandalism and bad weather?

We have several Council garages within the borough which are available to rent at very reasonable rates.

If you're interested please contact Housing Services on 01233 330688 for an application form.

Kent Homechoice – The New Face of Choice Based Lettings

Kent Homechoice is the new Choice Based Lettings scheme for all council and housing association homes in Kent.

Kent Homechoice gives you greater choice about where you want to live by providing you with more information about each available property and its location. Adverts will also include a photo as well as easily recognisable icons which clearly inform you about the characteristics of each property.

Advertisements are presented in a property list, the Kent Homechoice Free Sheet, which will be available to collect from one of 11 distribution points. A full list of the distribution points can be found within the scheme User Guide, which will be provided to each applicant as part of their Registration Pack.

The registration pack, including the Kent Homechoice Free Sheet, is also available from their website, www.kenthomechoice.org.uk.

When it comes to bidding for properties, applicants can now do this in many different ways:

 www.kenthomechoice.org.uk

 Telephone Number: 0906 2940020

 Text: 0771 81472726

 By coupon

For more details on bidding for properties, please go to the website or refer to your User Guide.

www.kenthomechoice.org.uk



Preparing for work

Ashford Borough Council, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and SureStart, will be holding a work preparation fair at the Stour Centre on 22 April.



There will be a range of employment and training workshops with advice and guidance on interview techniques and presentation skills from some of the area's top employers, including Denne Construction, Whitbread, Town & Country Cleaners and Prestige Nursing.

There will also be advice and information from the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as benefit advice from JobCentre Plus and housing advice from Ashford Borough Council.

There will also be a children's play area for any parents that want to bring their kids along.

For more information contact Colin Green on 01233 330668 or 07770315765 or email colin.green@ashford.gov.uk.

For more information contact Colin Green on 01233 330668 or 07770315765 or email colin.green@ashford.gov.uk.

Left: Advise on employment, training and housing, all under one roof

View from the Chair



Spring is nearly upon us and already the Ashford Borough Tenants Forum has a busy year ahead...

We have developed an action plan for the coming year, which we will be monitoring to ensure it is kept up to date, and one of the main projects this year will be to review the Tenants Compact.

Another big project this year is the Shared Service Vehicle and another one which will see tenants getting very involved. There will be a newsletter sent out soon to explain what the Shared Service Vehicle is all about and what it means to us.

There have been some training sessions recently with tenants travelling from far and wide to pick up skills about productive and useful meetings, and learning about writing and producing newsletters. See Page 4 for more on this story.

Closer to home, I am attending the monthly Housing Management meetings which is proving to be very helpful for the Forum. It gives me the chance to find out what the Housing department are working on, raise questions on behalf of tenants and provide feedback to the council and our forum members.

At the February meeting concern was raised about the escalating cost of rechargeable repairs, where tenants cause damage to their property and the council ends up bearing the cost. Tenants in future will be asked to pay up front before rechargeable repairs are carried out, as part of the drive to achieve efficiencies.

If you have any questions that you would like to put to the Housing Management, please let me know.

As ever, please get in touch if you have any queries about any housing matters.

Stella Cowland
– Chair of Ashford Borough Tenants Forum
01233 334206

Holy Days and Holidays

1 March: St David's Day
 Patron saint of Wales

17 March: St Patrick's Day
 Patron saint of Ireland

21 March: Naw-Ruz

Naw-Ruz is the Baha'i New Year and literally means 'new day'. It falls at the spring equinox and symbolizes the new life of spring.

It comes at the end of a 19-day fast and is celebrated with prayers and readings, food, music and dancing. As with other holy days, work is suspended.

10 April: Good Friday

12 April: Easter Sunday

21 April – 2 May:
 Festival of Ridvan

Commemorating the beginning of the 12 days that Baha'u'llah spent in the gardens of Ridvan during his exile, the festival is marked by prayers and the reading of sacred writings.

23 April: St George's Day
 Patron saint of England

9 May: Buddha Day
 The birthday of Buddha

21 May:
 Ascension of Christ

Perhaps the earliest observed celebration in Christianity, with worship, prayers and music.



Introductory Tenancies

In January 2009 Housing Services began using a new type of tenancy. These new tenancies are called Introductory and will be used along side our existing Secure and Non-Secure tenancies, but what does this mean to you?

The Introductory Tenancy will only

affect new tenants who are housed from our housing waiting list (via HomeChoice) and when we discharge our duty to homeless households who have been accepted under Part VI of the Housing Act 1986 (amended by the Homeless Act 2002).

All introductory tenancies are granted for a 12 month period, with an option to extend this by a further 6 months if there has been any unacceptable conduct.

Providing there are no issues you will automatically become a secure tenant after the completion of the introductory period, we will not notify you unless we intend to extend the initial period or proceed with evicting you from the property for breach of tenancy.

Whilst you are an introductory tenant you will not be able to exercise the Right to Buy or mutually exchange. You will be able to register for a transfer but your

application will be processed but no points will be allocated till you have completed the initial 12 month period

For more information or if you have any questions about introductory tenancies, contact Rebecca Newman on: **01233 330233** or email: rebecca.newman@ashford.gov.uk



Ashford Back Chat!



Calling all tenants and leaseholders...

We want to make it easier for more people to tell Ashford Borough Council Housing Services what they think, and to get involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods.

Most people have an opinion about the way the council does things. We want you to tell us where you think improvements are needed, and what you think we do well. To help you to do this, the council is introducing some new ways for you to talk to us and to make a difference.

We will be keeping a database or list of tenants from all over the borough who have told us how they want to get involved in improving the Housing Services.

Offering a range of options will mean that if you want to have a say, you can do so in the way that suits you best. We really want to attract more people from different age groups and backgrounds so that we get the broadest view possible, and may ask you to complete a Tenant Profile form if you have not already done so.

Here's how you can get involved

Monitoring Groups Discuss issues and ways to improve services that affect particular groups – these include the Seniors Forum, the Leaseholders Forum, the Repairs Monitoring Group, the Housing Options Monitoring Group, and the Housing Survey Monitoring Group [Commitment - one two hour meetings at the council offices every three months – training available]

Tenants and Residents Groups Care and campaign for local communities. [Commitment – regular meetings local to your home – training available]

Focus Groups A small cross section of people brought together to provide feedback on a particular aspect of the service. [Commitment – one-off meetings approximately two hours at the council offices]

Ashford Borough Tenants Forum Made up of elected representatives from throughout the borough. [Commitment – monthly two hour meetings at the council offices – training available]

Editorial Board Write and approve newsletters, leaflets and entries on the website. [Commitment - one two hour meetings at the council offices every three months – training available]

For some people, going to meetings and joining groups is not the way they want to participate. You may not have the time, may have other commitments or just not feel comfortable in that type of forum. But you may still want to have a say about what is happening in your local area and how Ashford Borough Council Housing Service works. If that person is you we can offer quick and easy ways for you to get involved and have your say, in the way that works best for you:-

Estate Inspections Officers, tenants and councillors identifying problems in the area [Commitment – walking around your neighbourhood approximately every six months]

Mystery Shopping A chance to carry out 'reality checks' on service and standards. [Commitment – complete and return a form whenever you contact the council]

Postal Surveys We write to you for your opinion [Commitment - occasional contact]

Telephone Surveys We telephone you for your opinion [Commitment - occasional contact]

@ Email Surveys We email you for your opinion [Commitment - occasional contact]

Online Feedback Give us your views at www.ashford.gov.uk/housing



Ashford Back Chat!



We want to make it easier for more people to tell Ashford Borough Council Housing Services what they think, and to get involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods.

Please tick the way/s that you would like to get involved:

- Monitoring Groups
- Tenants and Resident Groups
- Focus Groups
- Ashford Borough Tenants Forum
- Editorial Board
- Estate Inspections
- Mystery Shopping
- Postal Survey
- Telephone Survey
- Email Survey
- Online Feedback

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Tel:

Mobile:

Email:

Terms & Conditions:

All information supplied will be confidential and not shared with anyone unless permission is given to do so.

Please complete this form and return it in the pre-paid envelope with the contact details and chosen options identified. All completed forms will be entered into a monthly prize draw to receive £25 worth of high street vouchers.

