

June 2003  
Issue 45

# housing *news...*

FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Win a health and fitness pass  
for the Stour Centre ◀ PAGE 2**

**Choice-based lettings -  
is it working? ◀ PAGE 6**

# It's working

Students who have spent a year learning building skills were presented with certificates to mark their achievements by Ashford MP Damian Green.

The 20 or so young people from Ashford and Shepway had all successfully completed a construction industry training scheme run by the YBT charity and funded by a £1/2 million grant from the European Union's European Social Fund.

The result of the scheme is that trainees who for various reasons would not have been able to access a mainstream college course are now looking forward to a worthwhile career in the construction industry.



In addition to the certificates, three special prizes - tools for use in the student's chosen trade - were awarded to Steve Carmichael, Matt Kirkham and Will Harris.



The YBT scheme enables young people (and the not-so-young) to gain training within the construction industry and to receive a weekly payment while attending college and their work placement. Failing to turn up means losing pay.

There is no charge to contractors who provide a work placement for one of the young people during their training, which is provided by South Kent College. Other partners in the scheme included careers officers, housing associations, contractors and the Connexions agency.

Funding for the YBT scheme has been provided for two years, which will allow around 60 young people to be trained in skills that will help get them into a career while providing the construction workers that will be needed as Ashford continues to grow.



## Keep safe - AND WIN!

**Around 2.8 million people go to hospital as a result of an accident in the home in the UK each year. About a million of them are children and 500,000 are under-five.**

There are lots of things you can do to keep safe in the home – and here's a quiz that could help you to spot some of them, as well as giving you the chance to win a seven-day health and fitness pass for the Stour Centre in Ashford.

There are actually 18 hazards in the picture, so you will need to look carefully! List all you can find on a postcard or letter and send it to Sue Kennedy, Community Services Department, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford.

Don't forget to include your name, age, address and telephone number – and why not use this opportunity to tell us what you think of Housing News and how you would improve it?

If there is more than one correct entry, the names will be entered into a draw. Closing date for entries is 31st July 2003.

Ashford Weald has been given permission to use this hazard poster by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), a registered charity which campaigns for and gives advice on safety - in the home, on the roads, at work, in and on the water and at leisure.

For more information go to [www.rospace.com](http://www.rospace.com) or contact [help@rospace.com](mailto:help@rospace.com).

## Top Loader

**Tenants and Ashford Weald have shown how they can work together to make life better for everyone.**

Following a suggestion from Elderly Services Manager Richard Robinson, tenants at the council's sheltered schemes now have monthly meetings, and at one of them, East Stour Court residents suggested an additional laundry room on the first floor.

The residents wanted to provide two washing machines and a tumble drier and asked if the borough council would do the rest.

Area Manager Carole Winder agreed, and the council stepped in to convert the unused communal bathroom into a convenient and much-appreciated second laundry on the first floor.

"It shows what teamwork can do!" said East Stour Court Scheme Manager Betty Hockney-Coombs.

# Facelift moves closer

As the multi-million pound plans that will change the face of Stanhope begin to take shape, a number of important steps have been taken behind the scenes.

- Four bidders have been shortlisted to go forward in the bidding process. They are consortiums led by Moat Housing and United House, the Amicus Group and the Downland Affinity Group.
- The PFI Project Team has been working on the tender document, otherwise known as the ITN (Invitation To Negotiate).
- A draft of the ITN has already been issued to allow the

government to comment on it. The final version is expected to be issued during June.

- A dedicated data room has been set up to allow bidders to research borough council information which could be useful to them in preparing their bids. Great care has to be taken to make sure each bidder has access to the same information.
- The consortiums will also have to put in a bid for doing the physical work at Stanhope but not the housing management. Meanwhile an in-house team has been set up to bid for the housing management part of the project.

## Planned timescales:

Issue ITN	June 2003
Final date for bid submission	October 2003
Announcement of preferred bidder	December 2003
Contract signing	March 2004
Successful bidder begins work	May 2004



# Taking a tough line on racism

**Ashford Weald wants to see all tenants living in harmony, without fear of harassment or victimisation.**

Housing staff work within the Code of Guidance put forward by the Commission for Racial Equality and monitor the way the housing register operates in order to ensure fairness and equality.

The council also takes a very firm line on racial harassment by tenants and is determined to act

swiftly if any incidents occur. Any incidents are logged and referred to the police where appropriate.

“Ashford Weald is determined that racial intolerance will not be an issue in our borough,” said Housing Manager Tracey Kerly. “Our stance is clear - we will take action and we will involve the police if harassment occurs. Our conditions of tenancy reinforce the rights of all tenants to enjoy their home without harassment or interference.”

# It's a mystery

**“Mystery shoppers” are needed to help Ashford Weald Housing assess the quality of the service it is providing to customers.**

Mystery Shopping has been around for many years in the retail world. It involves people acting as real customers, accessing services and undertaking tasks to monitor the services provided to customers.

For the housing service, mystery shopping could be used to see what sort of response someone received when requesting a repair or reporting an estate management issue, for instance.

The aim is for Ashford Weald to be able to monitor the services that we deliver well and the areas where we need to improve the way we deal with our customers.

People who become mystery shoppers need to be observant, objective and have a good memory. They will be asked to complete a return for each enquiry they make so that the information can be used to direct resources to those areas where we most need to improve customer satisfaction.

The questions that need answering are: -

## DID WE

- Try our best to answer your query?
- Treat you with respect?
- Behave in a professional way?
- Make you feel like we wanted to help?
- Act quickly and efficiently?
- Make you feel like an individual rather than ‘just another customer’?
- Speak to you in a way that was easy to understand and jargon free?

What we need is tenants to assist us by becoming ‘shoppers’. Volunteers will be recompensed for their efforts and full training will be given.

Anyone who is interested in helping with this new initiative and would like further information should contact Housing Operation Manager Nicholas Watkin on 01233 330431.

## Working together

The document which sets out how Ashford Weald Housing Services, councillors and tenants will work together over the coming year will be distributed within the next few weeks.

The second review of Ashford's Tenant Participation Compact will be distributed to tenants throughout the borough to let them know what has been agreed for the coming year. Members of the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum played a major part in pulling it together.

## Photo opportunity

Could you help to brighten up the year for people throughout the borough by taking a photograph for the 2004 Ashford Weald calendar? Send your entries to Editor Jan Smith at Ashford Weald Housing, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford.



# Developing

## How Ashford Weald helps tenants

*An important aim of the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum is to help tenants to develop their skills so that they can play an active part in their community.*

*The idea is for members to be fully involved in the work of the forum, rather than just sitting in meetings and listening to Ashford Weald officers outlining new initiatives.*

*The new Tenant Participation Compact explains how important it is to "encourage tenants to contribute to policy development" and points out the need to train members so that they are able to do just that.*

*With that in mind, a number of Forum members have attended training courses recently. On these pages they look back on their experiences:*

### PAT PEARMAN

"The last course I attended was about 'Regeneration and Partnership working'. A partnership was defined as two or more people or organisations working together where aims and risks are shared. Successful partnerships have shared aims and a common goal.

People living together and sports are partnerships. You



Pat Pearman

must have mutual respect, trust each other and share information just the same as in any other kind of partnership.

Pooling experience and resources gives a co-ordinated approach to common problems and eliminates duplication of resources. Any partnership requires a high level of commitment from its inception to the final outcome, when hopefully a common goal has been achieved.

Five forum members are attending 'Training Highway' and 'Introduction to Computers and the Internet' courses. Surfing has now a new meaning; you don't need to live by the coast and rely on the waves! If you get the chance to

## Help us to help you

**An important survey document could be dropping through your door later this summer.**

Ashford Weald carries out a tenants' survey every three years, and will be sending forms to a wide-ranging and representative sample of people in early August.

"It is really important that people fill in the questionnaires and return them to us," said Housing Manager Tracey Kerly. "We want people to be honest so that we can improve our services where necessary, and we really do want as many people as possible to take the time to help us in this way."



# skills-

## play their part

go to one of these courses, take the opportunity. Not only is it educational, but it's fun."

### PAT BOORMAN

*Notes from a course on Anti Social Behaviour and Crime*

"What can we do?

Take more interest in where we live.

By joining local community groups, making ours voice heard.

Help to improve the area we live in by reporting abandoned cars, car crime, vandalism, fly tipping, dog fouling - and drug offences.

Very often the police do not attend when you call them, but if we keep reporting them they are still recorded and can be added to crime figures for your area. Perhaps we can then obtain more police presence.



Pat Boorman

Lobby your MP and local councillors.

There is a new government white paper on 'Respect and Responsibility'. One proposal is for 'parenting contracts' for families unwilling or unable to respond to existing support services. Another idea is applying to courts for parenting orders relating to anti social behaviour.

Protection of communities comes first, Anti Social Behaviour causes fear and isolation to people.

Citizenship classes in schools are needed; excluding children from school does not always work.

Young people need an interest shown in them, and some do not have this. If youngsters who are showing a tendency to bad behaviour are caught early, they can usually be turned around.

The current system needs to be speeded up. Local authorities have the existing problem of budgeting for the costs of obtaining injunctions and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

We also need to be more tolerant. Groups of young people are not always doing something wrong. We need to promote the good actions of young people in the borough; they should receive our support."

### BILL BERRY

"On assessing the course I must firstly say how much I enjoyed it. Our tutor Hugh Rawlings had just the right balance of humour and forthrightness to get his message across. I found I was learning without really realising it.

'Building Confidence at Meetings' was a great help, it gave an understanding of the need to plan ahead, take notes and memorise people, places and other items pertaining to the particular meeting being attended. It stressed the need to deal with emotions, bullying tactics and aggression and the importance of bringing out the person who sits in the corner and says nothing but may have much important information to impart.

The IT classes were useful, learning how to write a good newsletter being the most interesting part.

I would suggest only one addition, a mock meeting to enable role playing to take place."

**STELLA COWLAND** reports on her course on 'Homes in Hounslow'.

"Convent Way in Hounslow is one of the most deprived estates. It has a 73% ethnic minority

population and is a crime hot spot with no provision for youth.

Tamara Griffiths has been training as a tenant officer for two years. She had the job of seeing what she could do to improve things on the estate.

So she got talking to people on the estate. One lady she talked to knew some of the youths because her children were their friends. She got a list of names and got another youth worker in to make a video within the estate.



Stella Cowland

They were lucky to get a stunt group called 'Young Blood' involved (they do stunts for TV and Films). They planned to teach the youths to fight without hurting each other. At first it was hard to get the youths' interest, but once the youth leader got their respect it was easier. The stunt group has been working with the youths for three months. They have made a video and things seem to be improving."

### BERNI CRAY

"On 8th May I attended 'Innovation into Action' in London. There were five workshops, one of which, 'stronger voice' I went to.

It was a training package which claimed to teach consumers, users and communities about the planning and delivery of services.

Unfortunately it worked so well that most of the session was taken up with 'Consumers' having a (very) heated discussion amongst themselves, leaving the tutors to look on."

# Natalie is on the case



**Natalie Foster used to send people all over the world for short-term stays. Now she helps people who are looking for a permanent home.**

After moving to the council from the travel industry, Natalie is looking forward to a different challenge as Ashford Weald's Assistant Homeless Persons Officer.

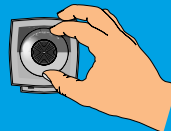
Natalie is involved with assessing the priority of people presenting themselves as homeless and then makes arrangements to find them temporary accommodation. It's a long way from fixing up holiday flights. "But it's still working with people – and that's what I like doing."

# Ten top ways to save

There are real savings to be made by remembering to do a few simple things at home. Here are ten top tips that will cost you nothing.

## 1) Central Heating

Turn your thermostat down by 1°C; You probably won't notice the difference, but this can cut as much as 10% off your fuel bills.



## 2) Hot Water

Water should not be heated to a scalding temperature. Setting the cylinder thermostat to 60°C is normally adequate.



## 3) Curtains

Remember to draw your curtains when it gets dark to stop heat escaping through the windows.



## 4) Lights

Always remember to turn the lights off when you leave a room. Adjust your curtains or blinds to allow as much natural light in as possible.



## 5) Televisions, videos, stereos, computers, electric

## toothbrushes etc.

Don't waste energy by leaving appliances on standby – particularly televisions. Check the operator's manual to make sure that this won't impact on the appliance's memory performance.



## 6) Fridges

Don't leave the fridge door open for longer than necessary as cold air will escape. Let hot or warm food cool down before putting it in the fridge. Defrost your fridge regularly to keep it running efficiently. If it refrosts quickly, check that the door seals are working properly. Try not to site your fridge next to the cooker or boiler. If you have to, then leave a good gap.



## 7) Washing machines and tumble dryers

Wait until you have a full load before using your washing machine, or if this isn't possible, use the half-load or economy programme if your machine has one. Try to use the low temperature programme unless you have very dirty clothes to wash



# NINE MONTHS ON...

**Ashford Weald's new choice-based lettings scheme has helped 377 applicants to find a new home since it began last September. Housing News looks at how the scheme is shaping up.**

On average, there are 25 applicants for each property. This means that the lettings team inevitably receives many calls from disappointed applicants.

Some who have been disappointed compare the system to a lottery. Others find it difficult to understand that anybody can be worse off than

they are.

On the plus side, choice-based lettings has helped to solve many difficult housing situations.

Void times have reduced and the system seems to be making the allocations system more efficient. Many people have moved to areas or types of property for which they would never previously have been considered.

The system seems to be working particularly well for rural properties, which have in the past been more difficult to allocate.

Choice-based lettings has also introduced many people to the idea that housing association properties offer a good opportunity for them to achieve a move and to benefit from a newer property – an encouraging trend as the amount of this type of property is set to increase.

The lettings team is also asking prospective tenants not to phone in on the day that allocations are made. The number of calls being received at the moment simply delays the task in hand. We will call you if you are successful!

# money

- modern powders often work just as effectively at lower temperatures.

Wring really wet clothes out before tumble drying them - better still, dry them out of doors.



## 8) Dishwashers

Unless you have very dirty dishes, use the low-temperature programme when possible.

## 9) Pots and Pans

Choose the right size pan for your food and cooker and keep the lids on. When using an electric cooker the base should just cover the ring. With gas the flames should only heat the bottom of the pan, not the sides. Don't use more water than you need - it wastes energy and spoils the food.



## 10) Kettles

Don't overfill the kettle for just one drink; heat the amount of water you really need. If you are using an electric kettle, make sure you cover the elements; jug-type kettles need less water as they have smaller elements.



# Don't pay to buy your home

**Tenants who are interested in buying their council home without risking a hefty bill for advice which should be free should contact Sue Major.**

Sue's job is to help and advise would-be homeowners through the process of buying their home – at a discount – under the Right to Buy Scheme.

Once she receives an application form, Sue will arrange for the property to be valued (which the council will pay for), work out the discount based on how long the tenants have lived there and send out an offer within three months of the original application.

The tenant then has three months in which to make up their mind, sort out a mortgage and find a

solicitor to carry out the legal work. And don't forget - Sue is available to provide advice and guidance during that period.

"You are never on your own when you are thinking through this important decision," she explained. "It is my job to help tenants through the process of becoming home-owners, without pressuring them and by giving them clear, unbiased advice."

Sue warned: "There are organisations which offer to help tenants buy their home, but this can cost up to £2,500. The council offers the same service free of charge."

Call Sue on 01233 330531 for an information pack or a chat.

## THANK YOU

**Ashford Weald Housing is always pleased to hear from tenants. When the news is good we like to celebrate our successes, and when there are complaints we like to learn from them. Our postbag currently stands at roughly twice as many compliments as complaints, so we still have some way to go.**

One person who was very happy with Ashford Weald was Derek Johnson, of Manorfield, who wrote to us after we offered his mother the sheltered place she was hoping for:

"You might remember I recently applied for sheltered housing on behalf of my mother, Mrs. Claire Johnson, in Oakleigh House, South Ashford – and on the 25th March you phoned me to offer her a flat at the above address.

"I would just like you to know how grateful my mother and I are to you and your team for all of your efforts in the above matter.

"I can't tell you what a difference this will make to her quality of



life. She has viewed the flat and cannot wait to move into her new home.

"I hope both you all receive satisfaction from your jobs knowing how you change old people's lives for the better. Once again, thank you so much."

Housing News visited Mrs. Johnson in her new flat just a month after she moved in.

"I love it," she commented. "I had had enough of living on my own in my old house. It was just too big and too lonely. I have always been a 'joiner' and I am really keeping busy here amongst so many new friends."

Compliment or complaint - get in touch and help us to help you.

# A move in the life of...

## Bernard and Brenda Smith



**It's not very far from a family home in Cudworth Road to a sheltered bungalow at Baxendale Court, Newtown.**

But for Bernard and Brenda Smith, the move meant a major change in their way of life after 28 happy years in their council home.

Helping them, both in reaching the right decision and in a huge number of practical ways, was Eve Mason, Ashford Weald's welfare support officer.

Eve is responsible for the council's



"Assisted Moves Scheme" which aims to make life as easy as possible for people who are looking to move out of a larger house into a smaller, more manageable property.

The scheme takes away the worry of moving, provides practical help with things like re-directing post, reconnecting washing machines, cookers and telephones, moving furniture and

possessions and re-laying carpets. Some applicants can even qualify for a cash bonus of up to £300!

Would-be tenants on the housing register also benefit, as the scheme frees up family homes that are no longer needed by older couples whose children have 'flown the nest'. Applicants need to be at least 50 years old and looking to move from a council-owned house into a flat, bungalow or sheltered scheme.

"My job is to make sure that people move at a time when they are comfortable to do so and when they will be able to make friends and settle down in their new home," said Eve.

"I make sure it's what they want and in their best interests and I try to make it as easy for them as possible, particularly if they are leaving somewhere that has been their home for many years. All they have to do is pack up their valuables."

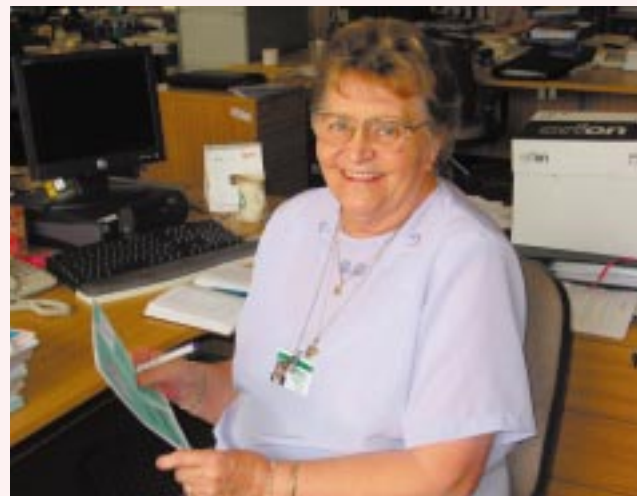
For 68-year-old Bernard and wife Brenda (62), moving was always going to be a bit of an upheaval.

"I loved my home and didn't really want to leave, but now I love being

here in Baxendale," said Brenda. "We may be fit and active now, but as we get older it will be very comforting to be in a sheltered scheme with someone to keep an eye on us – and it's a beautiful bungalow."

Husband Bernard added: "Eve was extremely helpful. She knew it was a big thing for us so she made sure that we took the time to think it through properly. She made sure it was our decision – but once we had made it she did everything she could to make the move easy for us."

And their advice to anyone else considering a similar move? "Think about it – and do it while you are still young enough to move together and make new friends," said Brenda.



## Coming soon

Up-to-date information on everything relating to your tenancy will soon be available in a new Tenants' Handbook.

The handbook has been revised and updated and reviewed by the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum. It is due to be sent out to tenants in August.

If you require Housing News in a different language or format, or on cassette tape, contact Jan Smith on 01233 330488.

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