


Housing News

TENANTS' NEWSLETTER FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

October 2004 Issue 50

- 
- **New repair contractors**
 - **Your guide to Ashford Weald Housing Services**
 - **Tenants' Forum News**
 - **New ways to pay your council bills**



IN THIS ISSUE



3 Competition

Count how many pumpkins appear in this edition of *Housing News* and win £20 worth of vouchers.



4-5 Housing Structure

Whether you are calling with rent queries, housing applications or repairs, the Housing Services Team is usually the first point of contact.



6 Tenant Participation Conference

Council tenants from Ashford will join forces with others from across South and East Kent for a major conference in November.



8 Cash Office Closing

The Cash Office at the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, closes on Friday, October 29, 2004. More convenient ways of paying your council bills have been put in place.

Contacting the council

Ashford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Ashford
Kent
TN23 1PL

Open 9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday
Open 9am - 4.30pm Friday

Housing Services
Team: 01233 330688
Repairs Hotline: 01233 330366
Contact Centre: 01233 331111
Main fax: 01233 645654
Civic Centre out of hours:
01233 613720
Emergencies out of hours:
01233 629911
Fraud Hotline: 0800 0262456
Text Link: 01233 330744

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

Tenterden Office
6/7 The Fairings
Tenterden
Kent
TN30 6QX

Open 9am - 1pm and 2pm - 5pm
Monday to Thursday Open 9am - 1pm and 2pm - 4.30pm Friday

If you have any comments to make about *Housing News*, good or bad, please contact

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www.ashford.gov.uk

A quick word from the Editor

Welcome to another edition of Housing News.

With Christmas just around the corner it's that time of the year again when we ask you to get involved in the Ashford Weald Calendar.

There are many exciting projects and events happening throughout the borough and I hope this year's calendar will reflect that. So, here's where you come in. Are you a member of a local group? Do you have an event coming up that we could photograph? Would your group like some extra publicity? I am looking to photograph two projects from Tenterden, the villages, South Ashford, Central Ashford, Kennington and Willesborough. With a variety of pictures, we hope the calendar will sum up the diversity and activity within the borough. So, if you would like to feature in the 2005 Ashford Weald Calendar, please get in touch.

I will need to know within the next two weeks, so contact me as soon as possible on 01233 330365.

Please take the time to look at our Ashford Weald Housing Structure. Here you will find a brief outline of who does what within Ashford Weald Housing Services. The important thing to remember is that tenants do not need to ring the main council switchboard for housing enquires.

There are two dedicated hotlines, which can answer your queries quickly and efficiently. Just call the repairs hotline on 01233 330366 or for any other housing enquiries call 01233 330688.

*Don't forget we are always keen to hear your views, so if you have suggestions for future editions of *Housing News*, please let me know.*

Philippa Dale

Cover Story



Local artistic flair, enthusiasm and skill was put to good use recently when the young people of Stanhope set about improving their visual environment. The previously unattractive and dreary fences that surrounded the soon to be demolished Luddenham flats, are now adorned with vibrant and eye-catching artwork. The artwork was organised by Ashford Borough Council with help from the YMCA and KCC Youth & Community and the Beat Project.



The housing services team is on 01233 330688



Repairs to your home

Tenants can rest assured that repairs to their homes will be carried out quickly and efficiently, following the borough council's appointment of new contractors.

Booker & Best Ltd and Serco are now in charge of day-to-day repairs to council properties. The Repairs Monitoring Group meet regularly to discuss how the council's contractors are performing and what good practice or bad practice is taking place. The group is made up of tenants, council officers and representatives from the contractors. During their September meeting, members of the Repairs Monitoring Group were introduced to representatives from Booker & Best and Serco.

Contractors visiting an Ashford tenant's property should be wearing a uniform bearing the company logo and be able to provide identification when requested. If you are in any doubt as to the identity of any person claiming to be a member of the Serco or Booker & Best team, they

will be happy to wait outside while you verify who they are.

Call the repairs hotline on 01233 330366 if in doubt.

HomeBridge continues to make a difference

Since opening its doors back in May, HomeBridge has been able to help more than 20 people return to independent living.

The recuperative care facility based at Farrow Court, in South Ashford continues to provide short-term accommodation for people that are leaving hospital. The clients receive the care and support they need in order to get back on their feet and return home.

In the July issue of Housing News, we featured Ethel Welch, the first person to use HomeBridge. We are pleased to report that after a short stay at HomeBridge, Ethel is now back in the comfort of her own home.

"So far HomeBridge has been hugely successful, with all our clients arriving from hospital or residential

accommodation, completing their stay here and then returning home or going on to permanent accommodation," explained Julie Stalker, Scheme Manager for Farrow Court.

The seven bungalows that make up HomeBridge adjoin the borough council's sheltered housing scheme at Farrow Court. "One of the most pleasing things has been to see the interaction between the tenants of Farrow Court and the temporary clients of HomeBridge," added Julie.

For more information on HomeBridge please call 01233 663170.

competition

Did you spot the dog?

Well done to the observant Housing News readers who took part in our 'Spot the Dog' competition. The lucky winners were Mr. Cook of Kennington, Mrs. Chapman of Westwell and Mrs. Morrison from Kennington.



Our competition this time has a Halloween theme.

Count how many pumpkins appear in this edition of Housing News and win £20 worth of vouchers. The first correct answer pulled out of the hat will win.

Send your answers to:

**Philippa Dale,
Housing News,
Ashford Borough Council,
Civic Centre,
Tannery Lane,
Ashford,
Kent TN23 1PL.**

Closing Date is Monday, November 22, 2004.



Housing Operations Manger Nicholas Watkin presents Mr Cook with his prize.

The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366



Ashford Weald Housing



Tracey Kerly,
Housing Manager.
As a tenant, are you sometimes confused about who you should contact at Ashford Weald Housing Services? Well not anymore!

This handy guide has been designed to let you, the tenant, know exactly who you should speak to if you have a query or problem in your area.

HOUSING SERVICES TEAM - Your first contact

Whether you are calling with rent queries, housing applications or repairs, the Housing Services Team is usually the first point of contact for all Ashford Weald tenants.

The team will ensure that all your housing enquiries, no matter where they come from and what they are about, are dealt with promptly and efficiently by a single phone call.

If necessary, appointments can then be made for your Area Manager to visit you. The Housing Services team receive over 1000 calls a week, the majority of which they can resolve instantly, which helps free up the time of your Area Manager.



**To contact the Housing Services Team call 01233 330688
or for all repair enquiries call 01233 330366.**

AREA MANAGERS - Who covers your area?

Each Area Manager has responsibility for a geographical patch within the borough. The majority of their time is spent out and about talking to, and acting on behalf of, their tenants. Working on area plans, managing rent arrears, viewing empty properties and resolving neighbourhood disputes is just some of the work carried out by our Area Managers.



Nicholas Watkin,
Our Housing Operations Manager oversees the work of our Area Managers throughout the borough.



Barry Moss
Stanhope
Bethersden
High Halden
Woodchurch



Ray Whitewood
Willesborough
Newtown
Town Centre
Brabourne
Smeeth
Aldington
Mersham



Natalie Foster
Kennington
Tenterden
St Michaels
Rolvenden
Wittersham
Newenden



Paul Hills
South Ashford
Stone
Kenardington
Appledore



Rebecca Newman
Stanhope
South Ashford



Karen Bone
Towers View
Charing
Wye
Biddenden
Old Wives Lees
Challock



Sam Diggins
South Ashford
Kingsnorth
Hamstreet
Shadoxhurst

Services Structure...

TENANT PARTICIPATION



Our Tenant Participation Officer, Philippa Dale, works with Area Managers to develop area plans across the borough. Philippa also works closely with the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum, encouraging tenants to play an active part in their community.



ELDERLY SERVICES

This team is responsible for managing services for the elderly, including the 12 Sheltered Housing Schemes across the borough.

They work closely with the Scheme Managers to ensure that our elderly tenants can easily access the services provided by Ashford Weald Housing.



HOUSING OPTIONS TEAM

The Housing Options Team primarily deals with Lettings and Homelessness. Our Homeless Officers offer advice and, in some cases, temporary accommodation to those who present themselves as homeless. The Lettings Officers manage the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and maintain the council's housing waiting lists.

PLANNED MAINTENANCE

Our Planned Maintenance team is responsible for the major works carried out to your home, including replacement windows, new kitchens and new bathrooms. This team is responsible for the three-year plan which details all the repairs that will be carried out and where. Our dedicated Repairs Inspectors, our Right to Buy Officer and Void Property Inspector all work within Planned Maintenance.





Berni wins seat on committee

Working with and learning from other forums, sharing ideas and debating issues that affect the whole of the South East – these are just some of the things that Berni Cray can look forward to after her successful promotion to the regional committee of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

“I first became interested in the work of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service after attending several of their courses, which provide help, advice and training for forum members,” explained Berni Cray, Secretary of Ashford Borough Tenants’ Forum. “When I heard a vacancy had arisen on the Regional

Committee I decided to apply. Once nominated, I then attended the South East regional meeting in July where I was asked to give a short speech.

This is a first for Ashford and it gives us the chance to be heard in the South East. It will also be a great opportunity for us to interact and exchange ideas with other Area Forums.”



Lend a hand and join us for lunch

If you live in Tenterden, are aged 50 years or over and would like to meet new people, why not pop along to the Age Concern Helping Hand Lunch Club?



The club meets at midday every Monday and Thursday at Little Hill and every Wednesday at Danemore. You can enjoy a hot two-course meal, freshly prepared on the premises for just £3.20.

For more information telephone Rita Claydon on 01580 766394.

Ashford tenants standing tall



Members of the Ashford Borough Tenants’ Forum have been toughened up after attending an eight-week course on confidence and assertiveness. The workshop took place at the Ray Allen Centre, Stanhope and was run by Hugh Rawlings. He explained the skills needed to be assertive from thoughts and behaviour through to the importance of voice. As well as confidence building, the workshop also taught the forum members how to deal with conflict.

Forum member Ian Dimmock found the course really worthwhile: “After just four meetings, I already feel like I’ve learned so much. It has made me realise how important it is to use the right language, to not put people on pedestals and we’ve even been learning how to say no.”

Tenants join forces

Council tenants from Ashford will join forces with others from across South and East Kent for a major conference in November.

This year’s ‘Joining Forces’ Tenants Conference will take place at the Leas Cliff Hall in Folkestone on Saturday 13th November 2004.

The overall theme of the day will be ‘Including Everyone’ and delegates will attend workshops on how to dispel myths surrounding immigration, domestic violence and deafness.

For the past eighteen months the Ashford Tenants’ Forum has been working alongside tenants from Shepway, Canterbury and Dover to produce a diversity pack, which is expected to be officially launched at the conference.

The pack will be distributed to community groups to raise awareness of diversity issues and to help group members challenge



discriminatory views and comments.

The keynote speaker at the conference will be Lord Victor Adebawale, who is Chief Executive of Turning Point, a social care organisation working in the areas of drug and alcohol misuse, mental health and learning disabilities. With a wealth of experience in housing, Victor will share his thoughts and experiences on how to include everyone.

If you would like to attend this year’s conference please contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365. Places are limited and preference will be given to those who attended the training course.



The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366

Decent homes are now standard – it's official

Every home owned by Ashford Borough Council has met the national Decent Homes Standard, more than five years ahead of the Government's target date.



Portfolio Holder for Housing Cllr Neil Bell (pictured left.)

"The borough council has invested heavily in the long-term maintenance and improvement of its housing stock prior to the introduction of the Decent Home Standard," confirmed Housing Manager Tracey Kerly.

"All of our properties now have full central heating, high levels of insulation, low maintenance high security PVCu windows and doors and modern kitchens and bathrooms."

"Making 100% of our houses compliant with the Decent Homes standard is an excellent achievement. The challenge for us now is to meet our tenants' needs to an even greater extent," added Executive

Over the coming months staff will be inspecting different types of properties to ensure the decent homes standard is not only maintained but exceeded. For further information contact Chris Tillin on 01233 330483.

"Work is continually being carried out to improve the housing stock over and above the basic requirements with modern facilities of the highest standard.

We call this Decent Homes Plus," added Tracey.

Though Ashford Weald Housing Services has met the Decent Homes Standard well ahead of schedule, the work does not stop at how homes are improved and managed.

It must also consider the wider plan for neighbourhoods, council housing and the regeneration of communities.

Housing shortage being tackled

As everyone is acutely aware the supply of social housing in Ashford, Tenterden and the villages is extremely limited. However, a recent review of the borough council's innovative Choice Based Letting Scheme has shown that help is available if applicants are prepared to be more flexible and realistic in their expectations.

Everyone on the Housing Register automatically benefits from the Choice

Based Lettings Scheme. All the major registered social landlords are members of the scheme. Every two weeks a list of available properties is sent out to eligible applicants. This ensures all have equal access to the information and are not disadvantaged by issues such as lack of mobility or transport. The list is also sent to support services, including social and probation workers, local health visitors and Shelter. Soon a property matching service will be available on-line.

Currently there are 2,500 people on the Housing Register and 100 applications are added to that list each month. On average only 500 properties a year become available. Applicants have to recognise that not everyone can be provided with social housing and that they may have to consider alternatives. We are unlikely to meet the immediate demand for social housing in an area such as Ashford.

To help meet the growing demand, we are investigating several initiatives to optimise the usage of the existing housing stock. In order to involve our tenants in this process, the Ashford Tenants' Forum has set up the Housing Options Focus Group.

For further information on the housing options available please contact the Housing Services team on 01233 330688.



As Mrs McDonald from Kingsnorth found out Shared Ownership is just one of the options available.

Ashford Social Services 

are now located at the

Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, TN23 1PL

Tel: 0845 330 2967 *

**outside normal working hours 0845 762 6777*

New members join Tenants' Forum

The Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum welcomed three new members this September at their annual general meeting.

Connie Cairns from Egerton, Robin Bateman from South Ashford and Maurice Fletcher from Charing were all elected members.

Stella Cowland was elected as Chair following Pat Boorman's decision to step down and Teri Witcher is now vice Chair.



Alternative Payment Methods

Cash Office Closes 29th October 2004

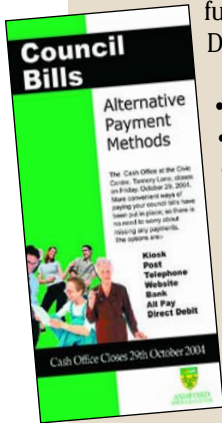
The Cash Office at the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, closes on Friday, October 29, 2004. More convenient ways of paying your council bills have been put in place; so there is no need to worry about missing any payments. The options are:-

Direct Debit

Paying by Direct Debit is the simplest and most convenient way of paying your Council bills – and it saves the council money which helps to keep future bills down.

Direct Debit means:-

- A choice of payment dates
- No queues
- No need to find a stamp, write a cheque or send it off
- You never forget to pay
- You stay in control
- You may save money if you normally pay bank charges



Please complete the attached Direct Debit form to pay your housing bills.

Post

Payments can be sent by post if you are paying by cheque or postal order. They should be made payable to "Ashford Borough Council" and the reference or account number written clearly on the back. If you do not know



your reference or account number please write clearly your full name and address and the name of service or bill you are paying for. Payments should be sent to PO Box 393, Ashford, Kent TN23 1WB.

Kiosk

Payments can still be made in person at the Civic Centre by cash, debit and credit card through our automated payment kiosks. The kiosks will provide change and give a receipt. If you are unsure of how to use the kiosk please ask one of

the customer service advisors who will be happy to help. If you have a cheque and do not want to wait, please ask for an envelope and deposit the cheque in our postal system. Cash will not be accepted by customer service advisors.

Telephone

Payments using Credit and Debit cards can be made 24 hours a day using our automated telephone payment system. Telephone 01233 330625.

Website

Credit and Debit card payments can also be made on-line at www.ashford.gov.uk. All on-line payments are secure.

All Pay

The All Pay system allows bills to be paid in more than 50,000 shops, garages and similar outlets displaying the PAYzone and PayPoint symbols, and post offices. In order to use this system you must have a payment card. Telephone 01233 331111 to apply for a card.

Pay Your rent by Direct Debit

Instruction to your Bank/
Building Society to pay by
Direct Debit



Originator's Identification Number

654064

Please complete parts 1-6 with a ballpoint pen and send it to: Ashford Weald Housing Services, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL

1 Reference Number

2 Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

3 Name of account holder (s)

4 Account Number

5 Sort code (if Known)

6 Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Signature (s) _____
Date _____

Please pay Ashford Borough Council Direct Debits from the account detailed on this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Ashford Borough Council and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank or Building Society.

Our Copy

THE DIRECT DEBIT GUARANTEE

This Guarantee is offered by all Banks and Building Societies that take part in the Direct Debit Scheme. The efficiency and security of the Scheme is monitored and protected by your own Bank or Building Society.

If the amounts to be paid or the payment dates change, Ashford Borough Council will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed.

If an error is made by Ashford Borough Council or your Bank or Building Society, you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your branch of the amount paid.

You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by writing to your Bank or Building Society. Please also send a copy of your letter to the Council.

Your Copy

