

# Housing News

TENANTS' NEWSLETTER FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

June 2005 ISSUE 53



- **Calling all Tenterden tenants**
- **Forum member named Community Champion**
- **Improving our service to you**
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*Our Area Managers now work in two teams to provide tenants with expert advice and support.*



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Ashford tenants' positive approach to diversity is praised in a national housing magazine.

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*Dedicated residents roll up their sleeves and take part in a litter picking session.*

## Newsflash!

*Ashford's Option Appraisal Review has just been signed off by GOSE (Government Office South East). We are the first in Kent to achieve this sign off and we can now move on and develop the comments of tenants, which were built into the Review. More on that in the next issue of Housing News.*

## 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

Editor: Philippa Dale  
Telephone: 01233 330365  
Fax: 01233 330610  
E-mail: [philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk)  
[www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk)

## A quick word from the Editor

*I have now been the editor of Housing News for a whole year and would love to know how you think I am doing. Is there anything you think your tenant newsletter is missing? Are any events happening in your area that you would like us to feature? Whatever your thoughts, please get in touch.*

*As you will see in this issue, the Tenants' Forum is as busy as ever. From holding open surgeries in Tenterden to scooping national awards! See page 8 to find out how you too could join the forum and become actively involved in your community.*

*There's just time to update you on the very latest Stanhope news. In a bold step to speed up the regeneration of Stanhope, Ashford Borough Council will appoint architects and surveyors to begin the next consultation phase of the estate's redevelopment.*

*After extended negotiations, the council has lost confidence in Partners for Improvement in Ashford's (PFIA) ability to drive the project forward and to meet the best interests of Stanhope residents. With little prospect of improvement in the near future, the Council took the decision to end its association with PFIA and speed up the project. Ashford Borough Council believes that it would now be in the best interests of the people of Stanhope to seek new bidders.*

*Neil Bell, Housing Portfolio Holder, said: "A lot of hard work has been put into this project over the past five years and Ashford Borough Council is committed to delivering the best solution for the people of Stanhope."*

*The Council will secure outline planning permission and also restart the bidding process. This will heighten the interest of new bidders by reducing risk and costs.*

*The next big step will be to work with residents to develop the plans. By hiring the architects themselves, the council should be in a position to sign contracts with a new partner before the end of 2006. The Government has confirmed that the finance for the Stanhope PFI regeneration project will remain in place. As always, we will keep you posted on future developments.*

*Philippa Dale*

## competition

### Win a prize with our Four Year Maintenance Plan

**A**s you will have noticed, this issue of Housing News comes complete with our new look Four Year Maintenance Plan.

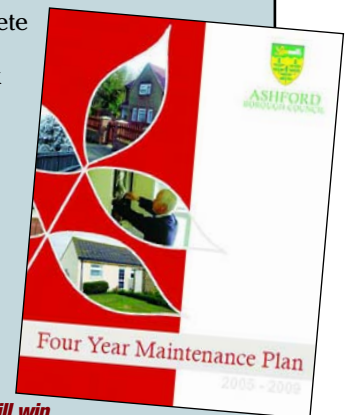
This plan has been designed to keep you informed of all the work that will be carried out to your home in the coming years.

To celebrate the launch of our new maintenance plan, we have £20 worth of vouchers to give away to a lucky Housing News reader. For your chance to win, take a closer look at our Maintenance Plan and answer this simple question, how many kitchens have we refurbished over the past 5 years? Send your answers to:

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

**Closing Date is Friday, July 29, 2005. The first correct answer pulled out of the hat will win.**

**Many congratulations to Mrs Adams of South Ashford who was the lucky winner of our Easter competition.**



The housing services team is on 01233 330688

Cover Story

# Calling all Tenterden tenants

Tenants living in Tenterden and the surrounding villages can now visit a regular tenant participation surgery at the borough council offices at The Fairings in Tenterden.

So, if you are a Tenterden tenant, keen to have a say in your community and make a difference to the lives of local residents, this is the perfect place to start.

Drop by and have a chat with our experienced Tenants' Forum members, Teri Witcher and Rowan McAllister, who will be on hand to offer advice and

guidance on how you can actively get involved in your community. They are also keen to hear your thoughts and concerns about their neighbourhood.

**The next surgery takes place on Tuesday 28th June, 2pm until 4pm. Subsequent sessions will be held on 26th July and 23rd August 2005.**

## From Luckley House with love

Sri Lankan children living in towns devastated by the Asian tsunami will receive much needed supplies thanks to the generosity of tenants in our Sheltered Housing Schemes.



Keen to do something to help, tenants of Luckley House, Summerleaze and Gerlach House recently teamed up to fill shoe boxes with toys, books and school equipment. The items were kindly donated by tenants, relatives and local residents.

The boxes will now be sent out to children living in the devastated Sri Lankan towns of

Kirinda and Yala by the Environmental Community Trust (ECT) an organisation set up in response to the boxing day disaster. Patricia Parkin, Executive Director of ECT explained how importance such collections are. "A small amount goes a long way in a country like Sri Lanka. Each box will make a huge difference to every child receiving one."



## Our Community Champion

Tenants' Forum member Pat Boorman has officially been named a Community Champion in recognition of her tireless work in the community.

The news comes as no surprise to the Tenants' Forum, of which Pat has been an active member of for several years.

Her tremendous efforts and perseverance were instrumental in the construction of Jubilee Gardens in Bybrook Road.

Pat successfully applied for funding to turn the previous concrete area into the colourful, popular and well-used garden it is today.

Her Community Champion accolade also acknowledged her determination to secure funding for the Bockhanger Young at Heart Over 60's group.

Despite the tremendous achievement, Pat is modest about her recent award success. "I was very pleased and privileged to receive my Community Champion award, as there were many people nominated who have achieved far more in their areas," said Pat.

The Community Champion awards were presented by the

Kent Community Foundation, an independent fund building and grant making foundation.

Fresh from her recent award, Pat was recently invited to share the secrets of her success at a Priority Estates Projects (PEP) Conference entitled 'Active Tenants, Active Neighbourhoods.'

As guest speaker at the event, Pat spoke of how she secures funding for community projects. "I was very nervous at first," admitted Pat. "It went really well though and I was pleased that I was asked questions afterwards. People seemed genuinely interested in how we achieved our golden Jubilee Garden. I was also surprised and pleased when I received 8.6 marks out of 10 on the feedback forms, all the hard work had been worthwhile."

The work doesn't stop there, with the Tenants Forum AGM just around the corner, Pat won't be putting her feet up just yet.

The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366



# Housing Services - I

In Housing Services, we are constantly looking for new ways of improving the service we deliver to you, the tenant. With this in mind, we have recently undertaken a number of changes to the department. To familiarise you with the changes and introduce some new faces along the way, we have designed this new guide to Housing Services.

The most notable change is that our Area Managers no longer cover all aspects of your tenancy. Instead we have created two teams, one devoted purely to rent collection and the other to estate management. Working in these teams will enable our Area Managers to become more skilled in their specific fields, providing tenants with the expert support and advice they need.

We will continue to have one Area Manager solely responsible for managing services to the elderly, including the 13 sheltered housing schemes across the borough. However from now on, the rent collection team will take over the responsibility of any rent arrears within this group. To ensure there is always someone available at the Civic Centre to assist you with your enquiries, we will continue to provide a Duty Area Manager on a daily basis.



## HOUSING SERVICES TEAM - Still your first contact

Whether you are calling with rent queries, housing applications or repairs, the Housing Services Team is still the first point of contact for all our tenants. The team will ensure that 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, from the necessary team, 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.

**Contact the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688  
or for all repair enquiries call 01233 330366.**

## RENT COLLECTION TEAM

This team concentrate on tenants that are having difficulties in paying their rent. The Area Managers consider the individual circumstances of each tenant and provide advice and support to those that need it, whilst taking tough action against those who abuse the system. Any tenant having trouble paying their rent should get in touch immediately, the rent collection team are here to help. Each Area Manager in the team is responsible for rent collection within a specific area.



### Rebecca Smith

Our Housing Operations Manager oversees the work of our Area Managers in the Rent Collection Team



### Ray Whitewood

Willesborough  
Newtown  
Town Centre  
Upper Stanhope  
South Ashford  
Brabourne  
Smeeth  
Aldington  
Mersham



### Karen Bone

Towers View  
Charing  
Wye  
Biddenden  
Old Wives Lees  
Challock  
Tenterden  
Rolvenden



### Sam Diggins

South Ashford  
Kennington  
Kenardington  
Kingsnorth  
Hamstreet  
Appledore  
Wittersham  
Warehorne



### Nike Dagunduro

Eastmead  
South Ashford  
Lower Stanhope  
Shadoxhurst  
Woodchurch  
Bethersden  
Great Chart  
High Halden

# - Improving our service to you

## ESTATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

This team are responsible for the general day-to-day management of our estates. Each Area Manager has responsibility for a geographical area within the borough. Working on Area Plans, promoting tenant participation, dealing with anti-social behaviour and resolving neighbourhood disputes is just some of the work carried out by this team.



### Nicholas Watkin

Our Housing Operations Manager oversees the work of Area Managers in the Estate Management Team.



### Barry Moss

Bethersden  
Lower Stanhope  
Woodchurch, Brookfield,  
Shadoxhurst, Biddenden,  
Egerton, Pluckley,  
Smarden, High Halden,  
Great Chart, Kingsnorth,  
Hamstreet, Ruckinge  
Warehorne, Bilsington



### Natalie Foster

Bockhanger, Stone,  
Rolvenden, Tenterden,  
Wittersham, Newtown,  
Spearpoint, Bybrook,  
Kennington Lees  
Boughton Aluph  
Eastwell



### Rebecca Newman

Upper Stanhope  
Woolreeds, Charing Heath,  
Charing, Hamden,  
Hothfield, Singleton Farm,  
Westwell, Little Chart, Wye,  
Hastingleigh, Chilham,  
Challock, Crundale,  
Molash, OWL, Shottenden,  
Crundale, Godmersham



### Paul Hills

Musgrove, Town Centre  
Twelve Acres, Watercress,  
Sth Willesborough  
Appledore, Eastmead  
Aldington, Brabourne  
Smeeth, Waterside,  
Kennardington  
Mersham, Christchurch  
Sevington, Brook

## HOUSING OPTIONS TEAM

This team primarily deal 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 housing waiting lists.

The supply of social housing in the borough is extremely limited. Consequently, the Housing Options Team spend much of their time advising people of the alternatives. They offer advice on sustaining existing

tenancies and obtaining housing in the private sector.

Thanks to additional Government funding, the team has recently increased with the welcome addition of two extra Housing Advisers, Debbie Simmons and Sylvia Roberts and a Tenant Sustainment Officer, Lorna Parrett. Homeless Persons Officer Dennis Violjoen also recently joined the team.

The Housing Options team are currently undertaking a review of the Lettings Policy to ensure it remains as fair as possible. The review is being undertaken with the Housing Options Monitoring Group, a sub group of the Tenants' Forum.



Debbie Simmons, Sylvia Roberts and Lorna Parrett



## Help us to help you

**T**enants are reminded that any repairs needed to their homes should be reported.

The reminder comes after a Stock Condition Survey found a number of problems to properties are going unreported. Housing Services can assist you with cracked walls and dampness, but only if you tell us about it! So, don't suffer in silence, help us to help you by calling 01233 330366 to report general repairs and 0800 7311886 for heating repairs.

Keeping the condition of your home to the highest standard is very important. When a tenant successfully bids for a property via the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, their offer is subject to a pre-transfer inspection. If your home is not kept to the expected standard, you could fail the inspection and lose the offer of accommodation. Help us to help you by ensuring all internal decoration and the general condition of your home is of the highest standard.

Before a mutual exchange can go ahead, both properties are subject to inspections, to ensure they are in an acceptable condition. Once the mutual exchange application has been received, we have six weeks to complete the inspections and administration, although we aim to complete the whole process much quicker. To speed up the process, please ensure we have all the relevant information about the exchange and that you are available for inspection.

**For more information and advice on pre-transfer inspections, please contact the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688**

## Does our repairs service need maintenance work?

**As Housing Services launch their new Four Year Maintenance Plan, tenants can rest assured that any improvements carried out to their home will be under the watchful eye of the Repairs Monitoring Group, but new members are needed!**

**T**he Repairs Monitoring Group is made up entirely of tenants, who meet regularly with council officers and the main contractors, Swale, Booker & Best and Serco, to discuss tenant concerns and suggest possible improvements to our repairs and maintenance service.

Members of the group are paid £4 per hour for their attendance and input and receive regular training.

Two members of the group recently attended a course entitled 'Getting the most from your Landlord or Contractor' and are keen to put their new knowledge into action.

**If you would like to join them and take advantage of the opportunity to influence how improvements are carried out to your home, please contact Philippa Dale, Tenant Participation Officer on 01233 330365.**

## How the Diversity Pack could help your community group

**A**shford Tenants have been praised in a national Housing magazine for their positive and proactive approach to diversity.

Speaking in 'Inside Housing' magazine, Lord Victor Adebowale, Chief Executive of Turning Point, a social care



**Lord Victor Adebowale praises local tenants**

organisation, has spoken of the impassioned views that greeted him when he attended last year's 'Joining Forces' Tenants Conference.

Victor praised the attitude of local tenants who were "engaged with the issues and insightful." He described how the tenants "genuinely wanted to find out what diversity meant for their community." Victor concluded that "empowering local people to talk about race is the only way to make progress at all," and it is precisely this philosophy that lies behind the diversity pack.

Members of the Ashford Tenants' Forum have worked alongside tenants from across South East Kent to create the diversity pack, which is now on trial throughout the borough and proving to be a

big success.

Ashford, like the rest of the UK, consists of different social, religious and ethnic groups. Diversity isn't exclusively about race. It also encompasses issues such as gender, disability, age and sexual orientation.

Consciously or not, everyone has pre-formed ideas about individuals or social groups, sometimes without having had any contact with them. These ideas shape the way people are treated and can be perceived as discrimination. The first step towards understanding how a person from a particular background might feel discriminated against – a disabled person for example – is discussion.

The diversity pack aims to



raise awareness of diversity issues by prompting discussion. It is hoped that by discussing views, we can look objectively at why we believe certain things about certain people and groups that we actually know very little about.

**For a free diversity pack or for more information please contact the borough council's Tenant Participation Officer, Philippa Dale on 01233 330365.**



*The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366*

## Knowledge Networking

Members of the Tenants' Forum recently attended a Kent conference to gain a clearer understanding of a range of social and housing issues.

The one-day conference was organised by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and featured a variety of guest speakers and workshops.

Some of the many topics discussed included Embracing Diversity, Involving Young People and Avoiding Tenant Burnout. Forum member Pat Pearman attended a workshop on the Home Office Crime Reduction Initiative and found it truly eye-opening. "The speed at which cars can be stolen was demonstrated by re-enactments of actual crimes," explained Pat. "Just getting out

of a vehicle to open a garage door, without removing the car keys, is sufficient time for an opportunist thief to strike!"

Guest speaker at the conference was Victoria Deakin of the Neighbourhood Watch Association. Inspired by the workshop, Pat is keen to promote such schemes. "Neighbourhood watch members play an important role in passing on vital information to the police to solve crimes. So, if your area doesn't operate such a scheme, think about getting together with your neighbours and asking the police for help in setting one up."

**For more information contact Neighbourhood Watch Liaison Officer, Paul Brosnan on 01233 619111**

## Crowebridge Housing Supporting local families

Local tenants struggling to cope with the pressures of family life can now seek help from a professional housing organisation.

Financial difficulties, alcohol or drug abuse, illness in the family, depression and other mental health difficulties - these are just some of the problems faced by families throughout the borough and they can easily spiral out of control. That's where Crowebridge Housing steps in.

This established organisation will provide you with the advice and support you need. Their skilled staff have experience in debt management, rent arrears, negotiating with landlords and credit companies, child



protection and above all, they are good listeners and know how to solve problems.

Crowebridge will help you develop the confidence and skills to once again meet the challenges of modern life.

**For more information contact David, Claire or Nicolle at Crowebridge on 01233 663182.**

## A day in the life of... Philippa Dale Tenant Participation Officer

For Philippa Dale, there is only one voice that matters and that is yours! From organising tenant meetings to developing Area Plans, our Tenant Participation Officer works hard to ensure the voice of local tenants is heard. We caught up with Philippa on a typical busy day.

### 9am

Philippa's day begins in the office catching up on paperwork. "A good thing about my job is that I rarely have two days the same," explains Philippa. Her involvement with a variety of community groups means that a large amount of her time is spent preparing for, attending or reporting back on meetings. Some of the many groups she works with include: the Tenants Forum, the Repairs Monitoring Group, the Bybrook and Bockhanger Community Group, the Willesborough Community Forum and the Senior Citizens Forum.

### 11am

Philippa meets with Housing Services' newly formed Estate Management team to discuss Area Plans. She works closely with tenants to ensure they have a say in their community and Area Plans are key to this process. During the meeting, the team discuss tenants' suggestions and concerns and Philippa agrees to arrange an estate walkabout. This involves sending out invitations and making sure local councillors can attend.

### 1pm

Time for a quick fitness class at the Stour Centre and a spot of lunch.

### 2pm

Philippa heads back to the office for a meeting with the Senior Citizen Forum. The group debate a range of issues affecting tenants of the borough council's Sheltered Housing Schemes.

### 4:30pm

As editor of Housing News, Philippa must decide what to include in the new issue. She liaises with council officers to ensure tenants are kept informed of the very latest news and developments within Housing Services.

### 6:30pm

Before heading home, it's off to Bockhanger for an estate walkabout followed by a meeting at Gerlach House with the Bybrook and Bockhanger Community Group. Through her attendance at these meetings, Philippa actively encourages tenants to achieve goals in their areas. She will report back on the outcome of this meeting, but that will have to wait for another day.





## Get Involved!

**“Improving our homes and neighbourhoods in partnership with Ashford Borough Housing Services.”**

Tenants and staff at Ashford Borough Council have proved that working together can make life better for everyone, so why not get involved and see the difference you can make.

There are vacancies for seven tenants to become members of the Tenants’ Forum. You do not need any special skills or experience to join, just a little time and a desire to talk to us about the way you would like your village, road, estate or community to be managed. Ashford Borough Council will even pay your travelling and childcare costs.

Nominating yourself couldn’t be simpler. Just tell us, in no more than 100 words, why you want to join the Tenants’ Forum. Are you keen to improve facilities for young people? Does the thought of representing your neighbourhood really appeal to you? Whatever the reason and whatever your views, we want to hear from you.

Please fill in the form below, attach it to your 100-word candidate statement and return by 18th July 2005 in the prepaid envelope provided.

If we receive more than seven nominations, it will be up to tenants and leaseholders throughout the borough to decide who gets elected. Your statement, along with your name, age and area where you live (but not your address) will be printed on the ballot paper to help tenants make their decisions.

For more information, please contact Forum Chair, Stella Cowland on (01233) 334206 or Tenant Participation Officer, Philippa Dale on (01233) 330365.



## Bethersden’s Big Clean Up

**Dedicated residents in Bethersden recently proved that local effort can make a real difference to the community, when they rolled up their sleeves and took part in a litter picking session.**

The committed group of residents gave up their Saturday morning to take part in the village clean up, organised by Bethersden Parish Council. Armed with rubber gloves and bin bags, they got to work collecting litter from the village footpaths and recreational field.

Tenants’ Forum member Pat Pearman was one of the many volunteers taking part in the litter pick and was impressed with the dedication of everyone

involved. “What a way to celebrate St. George’s Day,” said Pat. “It was great to see so many people give up their morning to take part. Everyone in Bethersden will benefit from the efforts of these willing volunteers, as by the end of the morning the village looked a whole lot tidier thanks to them.”

Residents that were unable to take part have already collected gloves and bin bags, vowing to do the job another day, what dedication!

### ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS FOR THE ASHFORD BOROUGH TENANTS’ FORUM

#### FORUM MEMBER NOMINATION FORM

FULL NAME

AGE

ADDRESS




TELEPHONE NUMBER

(For Office Use Only)

I have been a tenant  or leaseholder  for  years

Please return in the prepaid envelope provided or alternatively post to Philippa Dale, Housing Services, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent. TN23 1PL. **Don’t forget to attach your 100-word candidate statement explaining why you want to join!**



The housing services team is on 01233 330688