

SUMMER/AUTUMN 2011

# Housing NEWS

TENANTS' NEWSLETTER FROM  
ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ashford Gateway  
Plus



## Visit us at Gateway Plus



ASHFORD  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Inside:

- 🏠 Using solar power
- 🏠 Disabled adaptations
- 🏠 The digital switchover



ashford borough  
tenants forum

**Ashford**  
best placed in Britain

## Council contacts

### Housing services team

Tel: 01233 330688

Email: [housing@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:housing@ashford.gov.uk)

Repairs hotline: 01233 330366

### The Ashford Gateway Plus

Church Road, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1AS

Open:

9am – 4pm Monday to Friday

9am – 1pm Saturday

Tel: 08458 247247

Typetalk: 08458 247905

### The Tenterden Gateway Centre

2 Manor Row, High Street Tenterden,

Kent TN30 6HP

Tel: 0845 8279202

Typetalk: 08458 247905

### Civic Centre

Tannery Lane, Ashford Kent, TN23 1PL

Call centre

Tel: 01233 331111

Typetalk: 01233 330744

Lines open:

8.30am – 4pm Monday to Friday

24 hour Payment Line: 01233 330625

Benefit Fraud Line: 0800 026245

### Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum

Email: [abctfg@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:abctfg@yahoo.co.uk)

### Housing News

Editor: Philippa Dale

Telephone: 01233 330365

Email: [philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk)

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Join the ABTF Facebook group at Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum.  
Email: [abctfg@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:abctfg@yahoo.co.uk)



Oakleigh House sheltered scheme residents are delighted with their new planter and 'as new' seats and table, following a day's labour by Ashford housing staff that brought the sad garden furniture back to life.

Balls Builders offered their carpentry

skills and timber; the housing team dug over borders and planted the new raised bed; residents provided refreshments including delicious home made cake; and the addition of a water butt means that residents can keep their new plants watered.

## Have your say on how we can improve our website

The council is looking at how we can improve our website and make it easier for you to access services and information online. We want to hear from residents on what features you would like to see and ways to improve it. To tell us your views visit [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk)



## You said we did

We use the 'you said we did' logo whenever we report back on something you have asked for and we've been able to deliver.



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Cover Picture: Ashford Gateway Plus



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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## New play space for South Ashford

The borough's newest play space is now open in St Stevens Walk. Funded by the BIG Lottery and others, it includes the first borough sandpit for toddlers.



## New approach to youth services

Hang 10 is a new mobile youth team carrying out a pilot project with young people living in the Hackfield and Cressfield area of south Ashford, on behalf of the council and Affinity Sutton Housing Association.

The project involves asking young people what their priorities are for the area they live in, and will culminate in a community fun day in Watercress, South

Ashford on **Saturday 10 September, 10am to 2pm.**

This day will bring together various agencies to promote their local youth services, and also to help 'brighten' up the area with organised activities such as litter picking, graffiti removal and landscaping in the morning. The afternoon will include a range of fun activities for all ages provided by Hang 10, Sure Start and other agencies.



The Brookfield Street Project: sponsors Dobbies Garden Centre and green fingered schoolchildren from Ashford Oaks School.

## Children help make Brookfield Road bloom

This joint scheme between the council and Dobbies Garden Centre, was supported by Ashford Oaks School, which ran a competition for each year group to design a 'magic tree' and a 'green street'.

The winning designs are to be made into plaques which will be associated with a tree of that artist's choice.

The community project aims to tackle unsociable parking along the road in south Ashford by planting 60 assorted trees along the route. Kathryn Aylward, area housing manager said: "This was a fantastic project for the children to get involved with and hopefully the public will agree that the area concerned is a nicer environment as a result".

## Longfield play area finally gets its makeover

It has taken three years for the children of Longfield to get their play area refurbished, but the work is due to take place over the next few weeks.

We asked Abbie - now 16 - and her mother for their views. Mrs Hickmott said: "The play area will be of great benefit to the community. However, the time it has taken from inception to completion has had a deflating effect on the children who initially started the process, as some of them are now 16 or older and at an age where they will no longer use the facilities." Despite this, Abbie tells us she is really pleased that it is finally being completed.



# Using the sun to power our homes

Following a cabinet decision in July, the council has agreed to seek competitive prices to install solar electricity panels on the council's main commercial buildings and a number of blocks of flats by April 2012.

It is hoped that the council will roll out further installations on its remaining properties, as well as privately owned properties. A decision as to whether to extend the installation programme will be made in the autumn.

## Benefits of this project

The proposal will help to tackle fuel poverty by reducing residents' electricity bills, as tenants of houses with the panels fitted can use electricity that is being generated during the day free of charge, reducing the need to draw upon the national grid electricity from a traditional supplier. This could result in an estimated saving of between £80 and £125 per year.



This is particularly important given recent predictions showing possible energy price increases of 50% over the next 4 years. Those tenants and leaseholders of flats will have a reduction in their service charge as the benefit of the electricity saving is made to the communal areas of the block. There are around 2,500 properties that are potentially suitable for solar electricity panel installation. Factors effecting suitability include orientation (whether the property has a south facing roof), roof structure, shading and access. Full property assessments will be carried out with the agreement of tenants to determine whether the installation can go ahead.

A recent pilot project at Stonebridge cottages has proved to be a huge success and has benefited the tenants with the majority of their electricity during daylight hours.

Tenants and leaseholders in the initial phase will be contacted by letter. Information and support will be provided throughout the project to help keep all tenants up to day, answer any queries and help maximise the savings on energy bills.

Councillor Aline Hicks, portfolio holder for housing and customers, said "I think this is a really good project and I wholeheartedly support it".

**Watch out for future updates.**

## Follow-up on the new Hunter Close council houses

**Do you remember in the spring Housing News, we featured little Sienna trying out recycling in mum and dad's new green home?**

Well, we caught up with Sienna and mum Emma to find out how they are getting on in their new home.

Emma says living in their new house is "brilliant and better than living in a flat". She is getting used to the green elements in the house including the highly efficient condensing boiler, and the sun pipe which allows sunlight into the inner rooms, saving the need to use electric light during the day time. Emma hasn't yet had a fuel bill so was unable to



tell us how her energy costs compare to bills at her previous home, however she would recommend 'green living', and although mum is using the indoor recycling drawer, the novelty has worn off for Sienna - but then she is only four!



## Ashford celebrates completing new homes and receives funding for more

The latest phase of new council homes built by Ashford Borough Council were officially opened in July by the Mayor of Ashford, Cllr Matthew French.

On the same day, the announcement was made that Ashford Borough Council has secured £1.3m of government funding to build more new homes for local people.

The money will allow 59 new homes to be built, and will also help to create continued employment in the construction industry on a programme of around £18m.

# Visit us at Gateway Plus!

**A new Gateway for Ashford brings together the work of Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and voluntary organisations, and has already been used by thousands of residents from the town and borough.**

Ashford Gateway Plus provides a wide range of public services under one roof in a stunning new building in Church Road. All of the services from the original Gateway – including Ashford Borough Council customer services, payment machines and free internet use – are available, as well as adult education, the Tourist Information Service and an exciting new library. The Food with Friends Café will provide training, work opportunities and experience for adults and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties – and will be run by the community interest company Brogdale. Housing management officers will be holding a weekly surgery every Wednesday between 1.30pm and 3.30pm. One of the other many services will be a job club which will be held between 2pm and 4pm on the first and third Tuesdays of the month.



The first housing surgery at the new Gateway Plus

The reception desk at Ashford Gateway Plus will be open from 9am to 8pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 6pm

Friday to Saturday, where you will receive a warm and friendly welcome from our guidance navigators.

## Waterside housing surgery goes from strength to strength

The new Waterside housing surgery has proved to be a great success since its launch in May 2011. Residents have regularly visited the surgery to discuss a wide array of housing related issues, such as anti-social behaviour, rent arrears and debt advice. I have enjoyed meeting residents

in the relaxed environment that the Waterside Centre offers. If you would like to arrange an appointment, please contact me on 01233 330464. Alternatively, just feel free to drop in at the surgery, which takes place every other Thursday from 9.30am - 11.30am. **Anthony Crossley, area manager**



## ...and Tenterden Gateway housing surgery...

I am based at the Tenterden Gateway on the first Wednesday of every month from 9am – 12noon. This gives people an opportunity to pop in and discuss issues in a relaxed environment where I also have access to a computer if needed.

The typical discussions are about rent or housing matters, and any issues that may affect the community. This service is doing well and continues to be helpful to Tenterden residents who otherwise may not consider discussing matters regarding their neighbourhood. **Sam Diggins, Area Manager**

# Estate inspections

Please come along to the next estate inspection and we will arrange to meet you

Area manager  
**Anthony Crossley**  
 01233 330464  
 anthony.crossley@ashford.gov.uk

## Estate inspection dates and meeting points

### Brookfield West at 10am on Monday 7 November

Meeting in the car park by 289-305 Beaver Lane flats

### Egerton at 10.30am on Monday 26 September

Meeting at Elm Close

### Little Chart at 10am on Monday 26 September

Meeting at Bannister Houses

### Newtown Green at 10.30am on Wednesday 21 December

Meeting at the post office

### Pluckley at 11am on Monday 26 September

Meeting at the entrance to the Thorne Estate

### Smerden at 11.30am on Monday 26 September

Meeting at Chessington Lane



Anthony Crossley

Contact the Stanhope Centre on 01233 647396 or email stanhopecustomer@moat.co.uk for the time of the inspection you would like to attend

## Estate inspection dates and roads

### Badlesmere Close

20 Sept, 18 Oct, 22 Nov, and 13 Dec

### Bredgar Close

29 Sept, 27 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Brenchley Close

30 Sept, 28 Oct, 25 Nov, and 16 Dec

### Crundale Close

29 Sept, 27 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Eastry Close

29 Sept, 27 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Frittenden Close

30 Sept, 28 Oct, 25 Nov, and 16 Dec

### Kilndown Close

20 Sept, 18 Oct, 22 Nov, and 13 Dec

### Leaveland Close

30 Sept, 28 Oct, 25 Nov, and 16 Dec

### Luddenham Close

7 Sept, 5 Oct 9 Nov, and 7 Dec

### Lynsted Close

29 Sept, 27 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Newenden Close

30 Sept, 28 Oct, 25 Nov, and 16 Dec

### Otterden Close

22 Sept, 20 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Sheldwich Close

229 Sept, 27 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec

### Speldhurst Close

22 Sept, 20 Oct, 24 Nov, and 15 Dec



Tracy Bratten, Andrew Brackley and Naureen Ullah

Area manager  
**Paul Hills**  
 01233 330373  
 paul.hills@ashford.gov.uk

## Estate inspection dates and meeting points

### Aldington at 10am on Monday 5 December

Meeting at Walnut Ridge

### Bilsington at 10.45am on Monday 5 December

Meeting at Cossway Cottages

### Hampden at 10am on Monday 12 September

Meeting at Cade Road

### Hamstreet at 11.15 am on Monday 5 December

Meeting at Carters Wood

### Ruckinge at 11am on Monday 5 December

Meeting at Oakridge

### Tenants' Choice

You tell us where we need to inspect or we will revisit an area we think needs extra attention

### 10am on Monday 24 October



Paul Hills

estate inspection in your area. You can either turn up at the meeting point at the time stated, or ring us anywhere around the inspection area. We will remind you if you have already registered your interest.

Area manager  
 Kat Aylward  
 01233 330372  
 kathryn.aylward@ashford.gov.uk

## Estate inspection dates times and meeting points

**Brookfield East at 10am on Monday 28 November**  
 Meeting at Lewis Court

**South Willesborough at 10am on Tuesday 30 August**  
 Meeting outside 116 Herbert Road



Kat Aylward

Every estate inspection is attended by one of the trained members of the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum. This provides consistent independent monitoring of the estate inspection process.

Although we have given very specific times and venues, these will be subject to change and if you would like to meet us please give the relevant area manager a call and they will do their best to fit round you.

Area manager  
 Sam Diggins 01233 330374  
 sam.diggins@ashford.gov.uk

## Estate inspection dates and meeting points

**Bethersden at 10am on Monday 14 November**  
 Meeting at Orchard Fields

**Bybrook & Bockhanger at 10am on Monday 3 October**  
 Meeting at Bockhanger hall

**Woodchurch at 12noon on Monday 14 November**  
 Meeting at Brattle



Sam Diggins

New area manager being appointed shortly

## Estate inspection dates and meeting points

**Clockhouse at 10am on Monday 19 September**  
 Meeting at Clockhouse flats

**Godfrey Walk at 10am on Monday 31 October**  
 Meeting at Stonebridge Cottages

**Hillbrow at 11am on Monday 19 September**  
 Meeting at Meadowsweet House

**Rothbrook at 10am on Monday 12 December**  
 Meeting at Dale Walk

Area manager Ollie Samways  
 01233 330379  
 oliver.samways@ashford.gov.uk

## Estate inspection dates and meeting points

**Biddenden at 10am on Monday 5 September**  
 Meeting at The Weavers

**Brabourne at 10am on Monday 17 October**  
 Meeting at The Warren

**Brookfield North at 10am on Monday 28 November**  
 Meeting at Musgrove

**High Halden at 12noon on Monday 5 September**  
 Meeting at Greenside

**Mersham at 11.30am on Monday 17 October**  
 Meeting at Glebelands

**Sevington at 12noon on Monday 17 October**  
 Meeting at Church Road

**Smeeth at 10.30am on Monday 17 October**  
 Meeting at Calland



Ollie Samways

# Disabled adaptations

**Whether it is simple things like bath grab rails and extra stair rails, or major changes such as stairlifts and wet rooms, adaptations can transform how people cope at home.**

However, although at present the council spends £200,000 a year on disabled adaptations for tenants, the available budget simply cannot keep pace with demand.

We are doing all we can to set more money aside for such work in the coming years but some of the more expensive work requests have to go on to a waiting list.

If an occupational therapist has assessed your situation and recommended work be done to your home, please be patient as we try to tackle the backlog. Sadly,

some people will have to wait some time to get their recommended work done. In some cases it could even be two or three years.

This might be the time to look into moving to a home which meets your requirements without the need for adaptation, and help could be available through the assisted move programme. Although this is not the answer for everyone, it is always worth enquiring, and this could be a quick and practical solution to the difficulties you are experiencing.



# Assisted moves

**Are you aged 50 or over and live on your own in a council house? Are you struggling to manage the garden or worrying about getting up and down the stairs? Have you thought about moving but are worried about where you might end up being housed? Or do you just find the whole thing too daunting?**

Mrs Homewood from Hamstreet has kindly agreed to share her experience of an assisted move, which might help you to see that this could be the right move for you.

**I visited Mrs Homewood in her Hamstreet bungalow, and asked her how she first heard about assisted moves...**

"My Area Manager, Anthony Crossley was visiting me and suggested I think about an assisted move".

**What made you decide to apply for an assisted move?**

"I had made up my mind I wanted to move to Hamstreet to be near the doctor's surgery and shops and

transport. I was stuck out in Bilsington, and there is nothing out there".

**Tell me about the process.**

"My daughter used her computer to bid for me through the Choice Based Lettings. Then I was told I was being considered for a bungalow in Hamstreet. Kay arranged for me to view it and I decided to take it. Kay organised the carpet people and the removals. My son and daughter-in-law helped and did decorating for me. They also cleared the garden".

**Were there any pitfalls?**

"It was quite hectic but that might be a good thing as it helped concentrate the mind! I had to get rid of a lot of belongings".

**What advice would you give to anyone thinking of taking this step?**

"I recommend they really think about whether they will be happy – don't do it unless you are sure – after all you have a bargaining chip."

**What are the benefits?**

"I'm able to get out and about, it is more



**Above: Kay Devereaux and Mrs Homewood** convenient and although it is a lot smaller, it takes less looking after. The garden is easier to manage and I have my pots looking nice. I lived in my house for 60 years with my family and now another family has a chance to enjoy it."

**If you would like to know more about assisted moved contact the housing services team on 01233 330688.**

# Digital TV switchover

The digital switchover and analogue transmission switch off will begin in this area on 30 May 2012. If you want to check when your switch is due use the post code checker at [digitaluk.co.uk/postcodechecker](http://digitaluk.co.uk/postcodechecker).

For all matters regarding the Digital Switchover you can call Digital UK on 08456 50 50 50. Digital UK is the not-for-profit organisation employed by the Government to manage the Digital Switchover. They can provide free, independent and expert advice on all matters relating to the Digital Switchover and what you need to do to ensure you continue to receive TV broadcasts.

There are TV broadcasts and everybody will soon be receiving letters and leaflets in the post from Digital UK making people aware of the approaching digital switchover.



## Some key facts

**Aerials:** There is no such thing as a 'digital TV aerial'. Whether you need a new aerial will depend on the condition of your aerial and or where you live. If you already have a Freeview service, the signal is likely to improve at switchover when the power of the digital signal will be increased.

**TVs and recorders:** Almost all existing TV sets and recorders can be converted with a digital box for about £20. There is no need to go and buy a new TV. If you do choose to buy a new TV, look for one with the Digital tick logo, this means it's designed to work through the switchover.

**What digital service:** You can choose how to receive digital TV. You can use Freeview, Freesat from Sky or freesat which may involve a one off payment. Alternatively a monthly subscription will give you access to Sky TV, Virgin Media, BT Vision or Top Up TV.

**Re-tuning on Switchover:** This only

affects people with a Freeview service. You will need to re-tune your digital TV or box at switchover. TV channels sometimes move to new frequencies and go 'missing'. Re-tuning will bring them back. To find out how to re-tune visit [digitaluk.co.uk/retuning](http://digitaluk.co.uk/retuning).

**The help scheme:** The switchover help scheme is run by the BBC and provides older (over 75) and disabled people with everything they need to switch one TV to digital.

**For more information visit [helpscheme.co.uk](http://helpscheme.co.uk)**



## How this affects ABC tenants

All tenants will be responsible for making their own arrangements to ensure their TV sets and recorders are ready for the digital switchover.

Tenants in houses, bungalows and some flats will be responsible for making their own arrangements regarding the digital switchover and TV antennae where necessary.

ABC will make all the arrangements for upgrading antennae and distribution systems in council-owned blocks of flats with an existing landlords communal TV system. ABC will write to tenants soon regarding the upgrades, this will not include blocks of flats that have already been upgraded. The council is proposing to install systems that provide Satellite (Sky+) and Freeview services to all blocks of flats 3 storeys and over and at least Freeview to the rest. The programme for upgrades is planned to be completed by February 2012, well in advance of the first phases of switchover.

All flats in sheltered accommodation units have already had the communal TV systems upgraded and have access to satellite feeds and Freeview.

## Stanhope

Tenants have moved into the new properties in Sandling Close, which just leaves the Eastry Close site left to be finished.

The Stanhope Centre - containing Moat's Neighbourhood Office and the Stanhope Library - was officially opened in May. The afternoon began with a ribbon and cake cutting ceremony followed by an opportunity to see the new offices and library. The facilities and services available from the library were on display along with a photo exhibition of 'old' Stanhope.

The Stanhope Centre was a finalist in the 2011 Local Authority Building Control South East Region Building Excellence Awards.



# News from Ashford Borough Tenants Forum

## ABTF annual general meeting

ABTF will be holding its annual general meeting on **Monday 19 September at 6pm** with light refreshments followed by the meeting starting at 6.30pm in the council chamber at the Civic Centre. The speaker will be head of housing, Tracey Kerly, who will be talking about the influence of tenants in all housing policies and processes. Please come along and see what it is all about.

## Get the estate inspection on the calendar, and have your say about local offers

As several members of the forum got on track with estate inspection since May, we thought it was time to let all Ashford borough council tenants have some insight into estate inspection, and to personally invite willing tenant participation.

The estate inspections, if carried out in a correct and timely manner, will afford a greater working partnership between tenants and the council and together we can help develop the forward planning of maintenance and ongoing repairs to the housing stock.

It is the forum's recommendation that all tenants should spend just a few minutes each year to develop the package of services most desired by tenants.

The forum has been involved in agreeing the initial suggestions for service standards which will be used to develop local offers with all tenants. These will be presented later this year. The annual report to tenants will be available to view online at [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk) or in hard copy upon request from October. Contact Philippa Dale 01233 330365.

Please complete and return the back page of this issue of Housing News so that you can have your say about the housing service.

**Ian Rhodes forum member**



## How clean is your corridor?

If you live in a flat or maisonette and share landings and or stairs with neighbours, then you will know that Town and Country Cleaners clean your block, either weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on the size and location of the block. You pay for this service in your rent or service charge and should therefore be concerned about the standard of cleaning.

It is probably fair to say that not everyone has been happy about the standard of the cleaning during the two years of the contract so far. However, things are hopefully changing for the better because Peter Brooker has arrived!

Peter is in charge of the cleaning at the Civic Centre and following a reshuffle has now been asked to bring his expertise to the block cleaning. I caught up with Peter and asked him to tell me about this new part of his job.

First I asked Peter how he felt about taking on this challenging new role...

"I relishes the opportunity to bring my 22 years of experience to tackling this sticky (sometimes literally) problem." How did he set about assessing the current position?

"I inspected all the blocks once the cleaners had been in and carried out test cleans to check how well the cleaning was being carried out. This brought up lots of issues with the contract, and two stood out particularly.

"Firstly most of the blocks have no power so the cleaners are unable to Hoover or use any other specialist

equipment. I have solved this by putting in secure landlord supply outlets.

"Secondly 70% of the blocks have no sweeper mats (front door mats to you and me), which are specifically designed to remove water and dirt from the shoes of anyone entering the blocks. These will be installed in every block – hopefully before the winter."

But Peter needs **your** help. Would you be willing to monitor your block or landing or complete a simple weekly, fortnightly or monthly log, and perhaps meet occasionally with Town and Country Cleaners or officers to talk about ideas for improving the service? **If so please contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365 philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk**





# How are we doing?

## Stella at management team

For the last four years as chair of ABTF, I have been attending the monthly housing managers meeting. We discuss all issues of housing including rent collection, repairs, homelessness, new build, complaints, and much more.

I represent all tenants so if there are problems which affect tenants, I take it to the meeting get the answer and feed it back to the ABTF. Forum members recently attended and contributed to a workshop with housing staff.

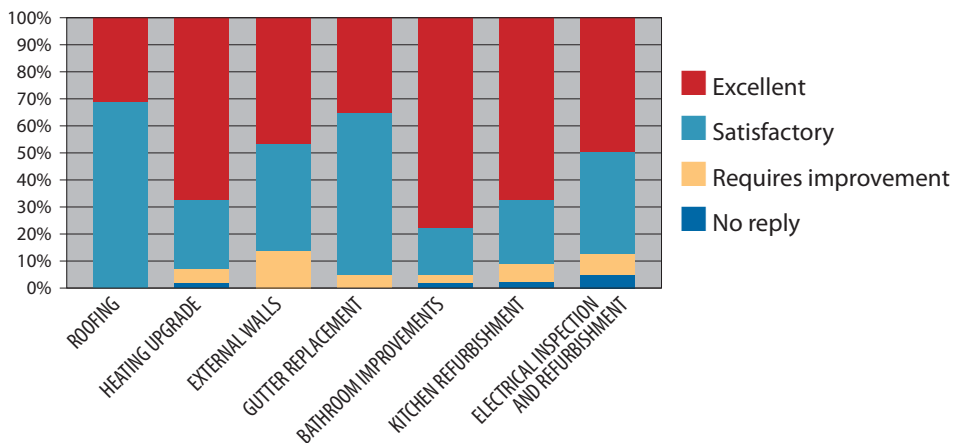
Stella Cowland ABTF chair

Each year the planned maintenance team completes thousands of improvements to council homes. Although these take in programmed work such as kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, and electrical and roof replacements, there are many other programmes ongoing.

For example, work relating to blocks of flats such as refurbishing communal areas, lift maintenance, upgrading door entry systems, improving emergency lighting, and fire safety work; and specialist contracts including asbestos work, insulation, water hygiene, and sewage treatment.

We ask for feedback as part of many of these improvements and you seem to be reasonably satisfied with the work we are doing.

### Planned maintenance 2010/2011 satisfaction survey results



## A rose for Pat

On 2 July forum members went to Farrow Court to plant a rose in remembrance of our vice chair Pat Pearman who sadly died earlier this year. Pat's husband Michael planted the rose and his family and friends also attended. Philippa Dale, Rebecca Wilcox, and Richard Robinson attended from the council.

Stella Cowland ABTF chair

## Ashford Housing Strategy



Jennifer Shaw

The strategy can be thought of like a route map; it shows where we are now and looks forward to where we want to be over the next five years.

An action plan sets out how we are going to get to our destination, who we will need to work with and involve, and how the process will be funded.

The current Ashford Housing Strategy ends in 2011. Following a review of what has been achieved, work is now underway with a range of partners and residents to look forward and decide where we want to be over the next few years.

### A few of the key achievements of the last strategy are:

- 622 new affordable homes built in the borough and the council embarked on its own house building programme.
- An accreditation scheme introduced for private landlords to improve conditions for those renting in the private sector.
- Energy efficiency grants have helped install 354 measures such as insulation and efficient boilers over the last 2 years, keeping homes warmer and easier to heat.
- Homelessness prevention work continues, with an education programme in schools and tenancy sustainment support amongst a range of initiatives.

There are many challenges ahead, with continuing budget pressures, and planned new legislation likely to have huge impact and we need to make sure the strategy is able to cope with these.

If you would like to be involved in helping to shape the priorities of the new housing strategy, please send your name and contact details (address, email) to: Jennifer Shaw housing strategy manager [jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk)

# WOW!

By Barry Moss, senior area manager

## What a difficult job I was given when I agreed to head up the judging for the garden competition.

We had 12 entries so - probably stupidly - I was not expecting great things, but I could not have been more wrong!

The standard was not only really high, it actually brought to mind some of the gardens you see on the TV, and the knowledge, effort and skill of those taking part of all ages, and including several working people – left me speechless (yes, me!) and completely in awe.

After long discussions we decided that three gardens stood out to receive gold awards in the best front or back garden category.

Every gardener we visited had given special thought to wildlife and recycling, making good use of composters and water butts, exchanging plants with friends, and propagating many of their own plants from seed.

Whilst I can well believe these are the cream of the crop, I am also sure that there are many other excellent gardeners out there and I wonder if we can harness some of this wealth of knowledge and experience to help those who would perhaps like to have a nice garden but don't know where to begin.

**Right:** Ruth Rick accepting her husband Paul's gold award. This amazing garden had always been boggy and waterlogged, so he has made a virtue from adversity and created a canal which runs round the garden and is a wonderland for his grandchildren.



Above: Gold award winner, Michelle Selwood from Tennyson Road, who has created a beautiful display to delight the senses



Left: Here we see Shirley Pennington, whose gold award winning garden in Brookfield Road is a lovely little haven of calm in this busy area.



# Garden Competition Results

Right: One of the silver award winners was Mrs J M Cook from Coronation Drive

Below: Highly commended: Mr and Mrs Woollett from Arlington



Left: Terry Botting from Little Chequers was the winner in the small garden category



Above: The best pots and containers category was won by Karen Millen from Mardol Road, whose garden had a Mediterranean feel.

Right: A special 'best quirky garden' award went to Jacky Dodson from Orion Way whose garden contains secret corners, fountains, 'bug hotels' and even a model Dalek!



# Young tenants tell us what's what

Below, from the left: Michaela, Rebecca Wilcox (operations manager), Sam and Kasha

**Are you a tenant aged 26 or under? If so, why not join Michaela, Kasha, and Sam to tell us what is important to you?**

At their last meeting they looked at some of the functions of estate management, rent collection, and resident involvement, and told us which bits were most important to them.

In return they received a £20 voucher, and their children were cared for in the Sure Start crèche next door.

For further information about how to get involved, contact Philippa Dale 01233 330365 philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk



## Here is a flavour of the services being offered by Sure Start

### Young Active Parents:

Do you have a child, or are you pregnant, and 20 years of age or younger? If yes, then come along to your fun, free and local YAP's group at your local children's centre. For more information call your local children's centre, Nicola on 07827 970573 or the YAP's phone on 07717 427536.

### Dads' day:

New dads' and male carers' group, every Tuesday, 1pm - 2.30pm, at Waterside Children's Centre. Designed to give dads the opportunity to get together and meet with other dads and have fun with their children in a relaxed environment. Call Waterside Children's Centre on 01233 624324.

### Story sacks workshop:

Come to Sure Step's Children's Centre Belmont Road Kennington starting Wednesday, 14 September 2011. During this FREE 10 week course you will develop the skills and confidence to tell and make up stories from everyday happenings and relate these to your children. An 11th week also provides an opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised qualification. To book your place or for more information call Sure Step's on 01233 624857.

### Building bridges:

This group meets every other Saturday (10am - 12noon) at The Willow Centre, Brookfield Road. Building bridges is a FREE contact group where children of separated parents can meet regularly with their absent parent in a safe and neutral environment. For more information and/or a confidential chat please contact Kareen on 07810 544460 or email kareen.mckeown@kent.gov.uk.

### Young people's sexual health clinic:

This will be held at Sure Step's 6-weekly from Thursday, 8 September (2.30pm - 3.30pm) and continues on 20 October, 1 December.

The confidential service offers a non judgemental advice on contraception, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and issues around forming healthy relationships.

To book your place or for more information call Sure Step's on 01233 624857.

**All these groups have been set up in response to expressed needs.**

Ask about other services. They may already exist in which case we can point you in the right direction or if they don't we may be able to help set some up.

## Road builders of the future?

Children try out different skills at an event called "What I want to be when I grow up" run by Sure Steps children's centre at Bockhanger in August.



# Your Letters

Dear Editor,  
 We regularly receive Housing News, but Hamstreet rarely has a mention or inspection. Is there a reason for this or are we forgotten?  
 Mrs Lodge, Hamstreet

Dear Mrs Lodge,  
 Within the estate inspection time table we carry out 'tenant choice' inspections and following your letter we visited the Hamstreet area. Although we did not find many problems, we were able to deal with a pot hole, some broken trees, and signage in a block of garages.

Thank you for suggesting this – hopefully other residents will follow your example.

Regards

Ed



## Leaseholders' corner

The Leaseholders Forum is due to hold its annual meeting on 29 September. During the past year, leaseholders have been receiving more information about potential expenditure in their blocks and hopefully the Forum will be discussing how these new arrangements are working. Other topics are likely to be the Leaseholders Handbook, and communication in general.

### A couple of projects which might take off, if tenants want them, are:

#### ■ Bybrook block gardens

We are hoping to work with the Bybrook flat residents to make their new gardens places they want to use, with help from Kent Wildlife Trust and other organisation.

#### ■ Belmont Place Newtown

Residents from one of the Belmont flat blocks have asked to take over a piece of land at the rear of their block – watch this space...

# cleaning WORDSEARCH ~ Win £20!



Find these 10 words: **CHEMICAL • HOOVER  
 CLEAN • POLISH • DOORMAT • RUBBISH  
 DUSTER • STAIRS • FLOOR • WINDOWS**

Complete the word search and entry form and send to: **Housing News, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL.**

Entries received by 30 September 2011 will be entered into our prize draw for £20 in shopping vouchers.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Tel: .....

### Wordsearch winner

Wordsearch winner Mr K Gurung from south Ashford received a £20 shopping voucher

**Terms & conditions:** Please complete and return this entry form along with your completed wordsearch puzzle to: **Housing News, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL.**

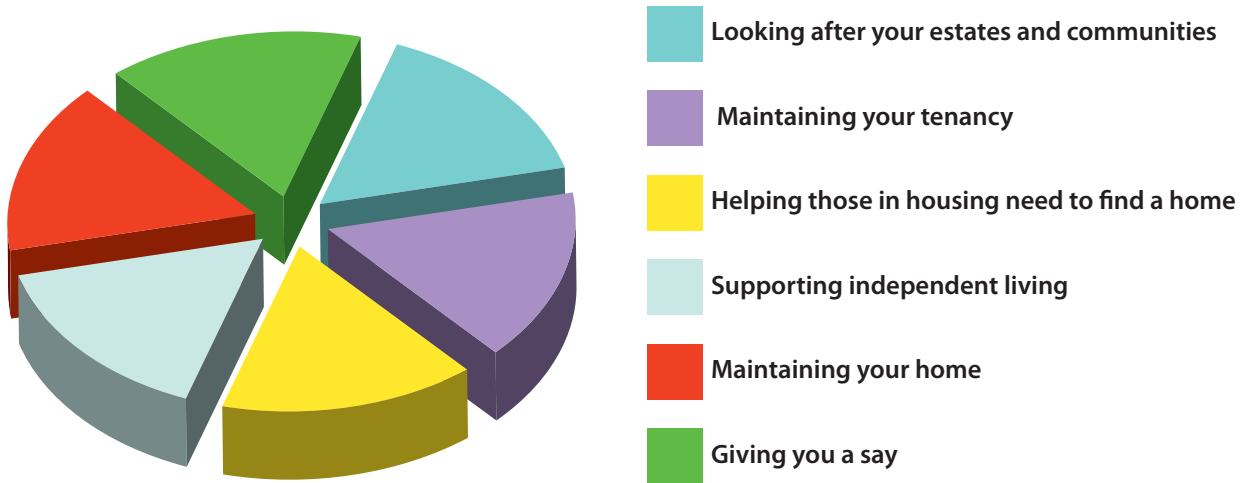
The decision of the editor is final and no correspondence will be entered into. **Closing date for entries is 30 September 2011**

# Tell us what is important to you

**We want to make sure the housing service works for you.**

In order to do this we are talking to tenants and leaseholders at various community events, through existing groups, and via housing news to agree a set of standards or local offers. This will mean you can measure us against these standards to make sure we are doing a good job.

**This pie chart sets out the main things we do:-**



**We have started working with groups to agree the four most important standards for each of these sections, and these will become the local offers.**

## Would you be willing to let us know what is important to you?

If so, please complete the slip below and return it in the prepaid envelope (with your wordsearch if you like). You will then be sent a set of suggested standards and will be asked to put them in the order of importance to you.

You can do as many of the six sections as you want.

We will use the information you give us to help decide which local offers to agree, and will feedback in the next issue of Housing News.



Name.....

Address.....

Contact details (phone/mobile/email).....

**I would like to prioritise the local standards for:-**

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1 Looking after your estates and communities   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Maintaining your tenancy                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Helping those in housing need to find a home | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Supporting independent living                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Maintaining your home                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Giving you a say                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I would be willing to join a focus group to discuss this  
(please tick as many boxes as you are interested in)

yes  no