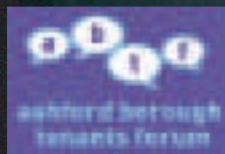


Housing NEWS

Winter 2008

Tenant's Newsletter from Ashford Borough Council

Spring Chicken Happy Birthday to Ashfords oldest tenant



inside:

- We welcome Roalco
- Money-saving energy tips
- Changes to benefits
- Christmas word search
- Stanhope - halfway there

Ashford
best placed in Britain



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

www.ashford.gov.uk

council contacts

Housing Services Team

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

Civic Centre

Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent
TN23 1PL

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

Tel: 01233 331111
Typetalk: 01233 330744

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

Out of Hours/Emergency:
01233 629911

24 Hour Payment Line:
01233 330625

Benefit Fraud Hotline:
0800 026245

The Ashford Gateway Centre

14 Park Mall, Ashford,
Kent TN24 8RY

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

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

Housing News

Ashford Borough Council,
Civic Centre, Tannery Lane,
Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL

Editor: Philippa Dale
Telephone: 01233 330365
Fax: 01233 330610

Email: philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk

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editor's note

Another year draws to an end and it seems that we're all having to take stock and look at ways to make the best use of our resources.

Nobody is immune to the economic downturn and one of the things we have had to do is reduce the size of our calendar, included free of charge with this issue, to help us keep costs down. We've always received lots of positive feedback about the calendar and we felt this was an important way for us to stay in touch with tenants about services and information provided by Housing Services throughout the year. If you have any feedback about the 2009 calendar, please get in touch with us in the usual way.

We are currently updating our computer systems here at the Housing Department, improving the speed and efficiency of the service we provide. We're hopeful that you will see no effect in our service to you but if there are any minor disruptions please bear with us.

Hopefully, you are all now familiar with the 'you said we did' logo as it has become a regular feature in Housing News – it certainly focuses the editorial team's attention on the areas in which tenants have said they are interested, so keep an eye out for it in this magazine, and if you have anything you want us to look into, just let us know.

Ashford Back Chat is a database of tenants and leaseholders who have volunteered to take part in future consultations, engaging with Housing Services in a variety of ways. This list is growing weekly but if you haven't returned your form, it's still not too late – see the back page for more information and, don't forget, you could be in with a chance of winning £25 worth of shopping vouchers.

Thank you to everyone who has subscribed to Ashford Back Chat so far and if you haven't been invited to take part in any consultations yet, you will be contacted over the coming months.

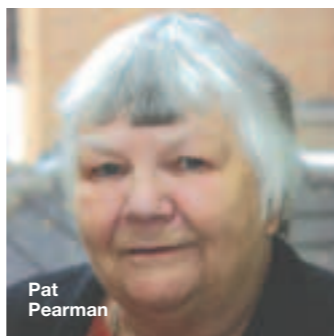
Your views, stories and opinions are important to us and we always try to print your letters, so please keep the mail coming in.

Finally, on behalf of the Housing Services Team, I would like to wish all of our residents a very happy festive season and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Philippa Dale, Editor



Philippa Dale



Pat Pearman

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR OPENING HOURS

Ashford Borough Council

The Contact Centre and Call Centre will be closed on the following days:
Wednesday 24th December
Thursday 25th December
Friday 26th December
Thursday 1st January

All other days will be as follows:

Contact Centre

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

Call Centre

8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Thursday
8.30am – 5pm Friday
Wednesday 31st December
– lines close at 5pm

Ashford Gateway

The Ashford Gateway will be closed on the following days:
Wednesday 24th December
Thursday 25th December
Friday 26th December
Thursday 1st January

All other days will be as follows:

9am – 5 pm Monday to Friday
9am - 4pm Saturday

Tenterden Gateway

The Tenterden Gateway will be closed on the following days:
Wednesday 24th December:
9am – 12.30pm
Thursday 25th December
Friday 26th December
Thursday 1st January

All other days will be as follows:
9am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday
9am – 4pm Saturday



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- 11 Competition Time**



Around The World 2008 - photo by Keith Wyncoll

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**.

Your new look Housing News has been designed and produced by Lightwave Design, Ashford
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Tel: 01233 623131 www.headley.co.uk

Housing Strategy launched (2008-2011)

Our new Housing Strategy sets Ashford Borough Council's vision for local housing, examining the housing and housing related needs of people in the borough and setting our priorities for action.

Adopted by the council in April 2008, the strategy sets out how Ashford Borough Council, in partnership with other organisations such as Kent County Council and East Kent Primary Care Trust, will work towards ensuring that all residents in the borough have access to a suitable home and related support services over the next 3 years. The Housing Strategy is shaped by extensive consultation across the borough.



Our main priorities are:

- Increasing the supply of homes
- Developing sustainable communities
- Supporting independence
- Ensuring homes of decent quality
- Providing accessible information on housing options

To view the new Housing Strategy visit:
www.ashford.gov.uk/housingstrategy



In September we carried out two focus groups looking at the council's rent arrears policy and the government's review of council house funding.

Although these are both quite dry subjects, participants showed real enthusiasm about these issues and the information we gathered really helped with these two important consultations.

Participants received vouchers for attending, as well as travel and childcare costs.

Focus groups are just one of the methods we are using to measure our services and shape future policy.

If you are interested in getting involved, simply fill in the Ashford Back Chat form on the back page of the magazine.

Around the World 2008



As Housing News was going to press last August, the Ashford International Association held their third annual Around the World event in Ashford town centre.

The sun shone down on a colourful day of music, dancing and performances from the many different cultures that live in Ashford, and this was truly one of the highlights of the summer events...and the Housing team were there too!

Joining staff from our Customer Contact Centre to promote the combined services on offer in the mobile Gateway unit, we soaked up the atmosphere and the sun, all the while staying on hand to deliver advice and information about the services on offer to residents of the borough.

Kent Fire & Rescue also came along to give demonstrations and join in the celebrations but the day belonged to the International Association who brought their own unique brand of colour, food, dancing and music to the streets of Ashford.

Here's looking forward to going Around the World all over again in 2009!



Changing times

Are you aware of the new improvements to welfare benefits?

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Employment and Support Allowance is a new way of helping people with an illness or disability to move into work, if they are able.

It replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support, paid because of an illness or disability, for new claims from 27 October 2008. If you are currently receiving these benefits you will continue to receive them, so long as you continue to satisfy the entitlement conditions.

Employment and Support Allowance will initially be for new customers only. However, you will be fully eligible for the work-focused help which will be available with the Employment and Support Allowance and can access this on a voluntary basis.

There is evidence which shows that people are better off in work, not only financially, but in terms of their health and well-being, their self-esteem and the future prospects for themselves and their family.

Employment and Support Allowance offers you personalised support and financial help, so that you can engage in appropriate work, if you are able.

It gives you access to a specially trained personal adviser and a wide range of further services including employment, training and

condition management support, to help you manage and cope with your illness or disability in a work context.

Central to Employment and Support Allowance is the new medical assessment called the Work Capability Assessment which assesses what you can do, rather than what you can't, and identifies the health related support you might need.

Most people claiming Employment and Support Allowance will be expected to take appropriate steps to help prepare for work, including attending a series of work-focused interviews with their personal adviser.

Under Employment and Support Allowance if you have an illness or disability that severely affects your ability to work, you will get increased financial support and will not be expected to prepare for a return to work; however you can volunteer to do so if you want to.

For more information visit www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk or call 0800 055 66 88.

Child maintenance

Child maintenance will now be fully disregarded when calculating your housing and council tax benefit entitlements. You must continue to tell us the amount you receive, but this will not affect your entitlement to benefits.

In addition the amount of child maintenance disregarded when calculating Income Support, ESA and Jobseekers Allowance (income based) benefits has now increased from £10 per week to £20 per week. From April 2010 this amount will increase again to £40 per week.

Backdated payments

The automatic backdated payments of housing and council tax benefits for claimants of a pension age has now been reduced from a maximum of 12 months to 3months.

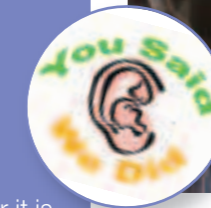
Area Plans

The Area Plan process, a programme that has resulted in many tenant driven improvements throughout the borough, will continue to operate around Ashford, despite the current downturn.

We may have to look at smaller schemes and may need to carry out work over a longer period; however, Ashford Borough Council is fully committed to this programme.

Now more than ever it is important to ensure that we can justify our actions and spending, and this means we will be working closely with community groups, the Tenants Forum, and partner agencies such as the Police, KCC Youth & Community and Sure Start, amongst others.

Together we will continue to strive to identify projects which will meet the needs and aspirations of the people living within the areas involved.



Beecholme Consultation

Around 50 people attended a second public consultation day at Bockhanger Community Centre in October, where local people had their chance to provide feedback on the proposed social housing development in Beecholme Drive, Kennington.

The day was arranged by Hyde Housing Association, along with their partners Osborne Homes and Sheppard Robson, to show the designs for the proposed development, which is likely to consist of 6 one bed flats, 7 two bed duplex's, and 7 one and two bed houses.

Young people from the local area came along to ask what would happen to the space they currently use to play football and representatives from Hyde confirmed that they would be keen to work with them to seek alternative facilities should the proposed development get the green light.

The day proved to be very useful with the Kennington residents providing good feedback on the scheme design. All comments will be considered and where practical incorporated into the design before it is submitted for planning permission.



Lee Robinson, along with colleagues from Sure Start, the Government programme to deliver the best start in life for children, put together a morning of fun events at Goat Lees Community Centre on a cold and wet day at the end of October.

Local children had fun making pictures with autumn leaves and decorating witches' hats, and they were entertained by members of Kent Circus School.

A crunch that is hard to swallow...



Britain is in the midst of a credit crunch with everyone feeling the pinch. With the festive period rapidly approaching this can be a very difficult time of

year, especially if you are on a low income. Budgeting for everything from every day household expenses to gifts and presents for loved ones can be difficult and confusing – but help is at hand!

If you are finding it difficult to manage your finances there are places and people who can help:

- Contact your Income Officer in Housing Services (01233 330688) who will be happy to sit down and go through a financial statement with you and check to see if you are entitled to any benefits

- Contacting the Citizens Advice Bureau (01233 626185) or Shelter (0844 515 1444) who both offer independent debt and welfare advice
- Floating Support – housing related support services provided free by the Supporting People Team (01622 694953/01622 694825)
- Contacting the Consumer Credit Counselling Service – You're just a call away from practice, free debt advice 0800 138 1111

There are few things more important in life than keeping a roof over your head. Sometimes it's not that easy, but we're here to help where we can. Please contact Housing Services as soon as you start to experience money problems.

Don't forget if you have a clear rent account on the 21 December 2008 you will be entitled to 2 rent free weeks over the festive period!

A Roalco Welcome



As of 1 October 2008 Roalco will be taking of all of our general repairs in Ashford and will be doing so for the next ten years.

By now you may have already met our new contractors, if not they will become familiar to many residents over the next ten years, so please join us in working to achieve and maintain a good working relationship with them.

The company will be setting up an Ashford base shortly, but in the mean time will carry out work from their Maidstone office.

New ten-year contracts have also been awarded to Prima to carry out UPVC window and door replacements, repairs, and servicing,

and to Balls Construction who will continue to carry out works on any vacant properties.

The Facts – Roalco... :

- formed in 1977
- are principal contractor to more than 30 Housing Association and Local Authorities throughout East Anglia, the South of England and South Wales.
- employ over 200 trades people delivering a first class service of property maintenance.
- refurbish over 3000 void properties a year.
- return customer satisfaction figures between 98.9% and 100%.

To report a repair call the Repairs Hotline on 01233 330366

Winter Warmers: Fuel Poverty



At this time last year we reported that some two million households in the UK in 2004 were in fuel poverty. New figures produced by National Energy Action estimate that the latest round of energy company price hikes will push 1 in 5 households in the UK into fuel poverty. This is almost as high as 1996 when fuel poverty data was first collected, and an increase in the number of fuel poor household of 1.3 million since the beginning of the year.

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

1) Central Heating

If you are too warm then turn down your thermostat by 1oC; this can cut up to 10% off your fuel bills.

2) Hot Water

Water should not be heated to a scalding temperature. Normally,

adjusting the cylinder thermostat to 60oC will be adequate for household use.

3) Curtains

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

4) Lights

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

5) Televisions, Videos, Stereos, Computers, Cordless phones and Electric toothbrushes.

Don't waste energy by leaving appliances on standby unnecessarily. But 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. Avoid putting hot or warm food straight into the fridge; allow it to cool down first. Defrost your fridge regularly as this will help to keep it running efficiently, and so reduce running costs. If it refrosts quickly, check that the door seals are working properly.

7) Washing machines and tumble dryers

Try to wait until you have a full load

before using your washing machine. 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. Modern washing powders often work just as effectively at lower temperatures. Don't put really wet clothes into the tumble dryer; wring them out first. It's much faster and it will save energy and money. Better still dry them out of doors if you can.

8) Dishwashers

When possible use the low-temperature programme unless you have very dirty dishes.

9) Pots and Pans

Choose the right size pan for your food and cooker, and keep lids on when cooking. The base should just cover an electric cooking ring. With gas, you need to ensure that the flames only heat the bottom of the pan. If they are coming up the side of the pan then you are wasting heat. Don't use more water than you need. Not only does this waste energy it also spoils the food.

10) Kettles

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

What is Fuel Poverty?

A household is said to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10 per cent of its income on fuel to maintain warmth.

ABANDONED CARS

The scourge of abandoned and un-taxed cars is again returning to our estates as the price of scrap metal falls across the world.

We are taking a tough approach to this problem and will be actively stickering cars that are un-taxed, warning the owners that they have 15 days to remove them.

If no action is taken then we will be doing everything in our power to get them removed, which will mean a significant amount of money has to be paid to get them back, and in some cases, vehicles may be crushed.

There is a common misconception that vehicles that have a Statutory Off Road Notice can be left in our car parks, but this is not allowed. Holding a Statutory Off Road Notice is only valid if the vehicle is parked with the



permission of the land owner and Ashford Borough Council DO NOT give permission for these vehicles to be left in our car parking areas.

We want to keep our estates a pleasant place for everyone to live, so be warned. Any un-taxed, Statutory Off Road Notice or abandoned cars will be disappearing from our streets soon.

If you or anyone you know has a vehicle that is illegally parked, it must be moved before we move it for you.

If you have any queries or want to report a car that has been abandoned, please contact Ashford Borough Council on 01233 331111



Cleaning Up

The new cleaning contract has been in operation since September this year and whilst we have received lots of positive feedback, there have also been some concerns raised.

We welcome all feedback, both positive and negative, because it is only by hearing from tenants that are receiving this service that we can find out what is working well and whether there are any areas that we need to look into.

Ashford Borough Council and its contractors, Town & Country

Cleaners, are committed to making the service as successful as possible and with your help and feedback, we will achieve our goals.

If you live in a flat that receives the cleaning service you will shortly be receiving a cleaning timetable together with confirmation of the service standard that you can expect.

You will also receive a satisfaction survey and we would encourage you to give us your honest feedback, as well as any suggestions, so we can endeavour to continuously improve the service we offer.

If you have any queries about the cleaning service, you can contact us on 01233 330688

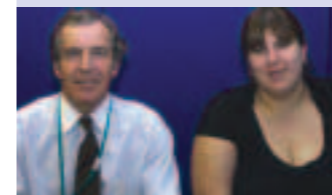
Ashford Neighbourhood Walkabouts



Ashford Borough Council's Housing Area Managers and Neighbourhood Officers from Moat invite you to join them on their weekly neighbourhood walkabouts this winter.

As local residents, you are perfectly placed to let us know about the issues that are important to you and can help us to identify the areas that we may need to be looking into and dealing with.

Our friendly and approachable officers are keen to hear from you so if you want to join us on our walkabouts, please call the team for your area or just turn up at the meeting points below.



Jo Wickens and Barry Moss

You can reach Jo and Barry on 01233 330376

Twelve Acres

Monday 5 January, 2pm
Meeting in the parking area at Sotherton

Repton Manor and Poets Corner

Monday 19 January, 2pm
Meeting at Norwood Gardens by the pet shop

Warehorne, Kennardington, Appledore, Stone, and Ebony

Monday 2 February, 2pm
Meeting at Glebe Villas

Hillbrow and Clockhouse

Monday 16 February, 2pm
Meeting at Meadowsweet House car park

Rolvenden, Newenden and Wittersham

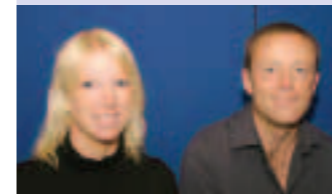
Monday 2 March, 2pm
Meeting at Swan Cottages, Wittersham

Woolreeds

Monday 16 March, 2pm
Meeting at Court Wurtin shops

Godfrey Walk

Monday 30 March, 2pm
Meeting at the entrance to 1-4 Pound House



Kat Aylward and Anthony Crossley

You can reach Kat and Anthony on 01233 330372

Newtown Green

Monday 15 December, 2pm
Meeting at the post office

Aldington, Bilsington, Ruckinge, and Hamstreet

Monday 12 January, 2pm
Meeting at Ragstone Hollow, Aldington, by the fire station

South Willesborough

Monday 26 January, 2pm
Meeting at Albion Place by the bridge

Hampden

Monday 9 February, 2pm
Meeting at the junction of Tennyson Road and Wotton Road

Monday 23 February
Open slot - Tell us where you want to go or we can revisit an area

Bybrook and Bockhanger

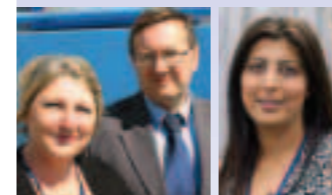
Monday 9 March, 2pm
Meeting at Nine Acres entrance to garage block P opposite the cemetery gates

Kingsnorth, Shadoxhurst and Great Chart

Monday 23 March, 2pm
Meeting at Stumble Lane Kingsnorth

Brookfield

Monday 6 April, 2pm
Meeting at the garage area by 133 Beaver Lane



Andrew Brackey, Tracey Homden and Naureen Ullah

You can reach Andrew, Tracey and Naureen on 01233 647396

Andrew's routes:

Eastry Close, Sheldwich Close, Lynsted Close, Crundale Close and Sandling Close

Thursday 29 January
Thursday 26 February
Thursday 26 March
All meeting points are at the main entrance to Eastry Close Flats at 9.30am

Leaveland Close

Friday 30 January
Friday 27 February
Friday 27 March
All meeting points are at the main entrance to Leaveland Close Flats at 9.30am

Tracey's routes:

Luddenham Close

Wednesday 14 January
Wednesday 11 February
Wednesday 11 March
All meeting points are at the Neighbourhood Office at 9.15am

Bredgar Close

Wednesday 14 January
Wednesday 11 February
Wednesday 11 March
All meeting points are at the Neighbourhood Office at 10.15am

Newenden Close

Friday 16 January
Friday 13 February
Friday 13 March
All meeting points are at the Neighbourhood Office at 9.45am

Naureen's routes:

Baddlesmere Close and Frittenden Close

Wednesday 14 January
Wednesday 11 February
Wednesday 11 March

Brenchley Cose and Kildown Close

Tuesday 20 January
Monday 23 February
Wednesday 18 March

Otterden Close and Speldhurst Close

Thursday 22 January
Wednesday 25 February
Friday 20 March
Please call Naureen for meeting points and times

Tackling Domestic Violence

It is a sad fact that the pressures on families at Christmas can sometimes result in domestic violence. This can arise because of a combination of financial worries, alcohol consumption, and other seasonal stresses among any number of reasons.

For victims of domestic violence help is available from a number of sources, including Ashford Borough Council's Domestic Violence Prevention Officer, Kate Turner.

Kate is based in our Housing Services team and offers advice on behalf of victims of domestic violence in Ashford and Maidstone. Clients may be referred by the police or other agencies, but you can also contact Kate directly by telephone.

In extreme cases Kate helps victims who are forced to flee their homes, finding them temporary accommodation in refuges and even relocating them on a permanent basis.

"We have good contacts with the refuges, but in terms of permanent accommodation, this is much more of a challenge. Due to the shortages of social housing, simply relocating victims of domestic violence is not always the best solution; however, in some cases it is the only viable option and we have had to help some people move to other areas of the country for their own safety."

In addition to these services, the Sanctuary Project can assist with security modifications, such as additional door and window locks, securing front doors, providing spy holes, and improving lighting. The project can also investigate the possibility of creating a safe room in the victim's home to enable them to contact the police.

If you are a victim of domestic violence and need help you can contact Kate on 07919 493341.

You can also contact the Police Victim Support Line on 0845 30 30 900 or the National Domestic Violence helpline on 0802 000 247.

In emergencies you should call the Police on 999.

Ashford Interagency Domestic Abuse Forum

Services available in the Ashford area for victims of domestic abuse

Domestic Abuse Drop-in

1st & 3rd Tuesday every month

12 – 2pm Ashford Gateway, Park Mall, Ashford

Free, confidential advice from *Legal services * Victim Support * Housing * Kent Police * Benefits Agency * Kent Council on Addiction * Citizens Advice (non-molestation & occupancy orders etc)

Freedom Programme

Wednesday mornings 10 – 12 noon (term time only)

Please contact Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator Tel: 01233 618014

12 week programme exploring tactics and beliefs of abusive men.

24 hour Information line - 0845 603 6813

Information on local advice and support services for victims of domestic abuse

Daffodil Group

Thursday afternoons at Willow Centre 1 – 2.30pm

Please contact Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator Tel: 01233 618014

Weekly support with monthly demonstrations including make-up, nails, "colours" and massage. Take some time for yourself, children welcome

Legal Advice Surgery

First Tuesday of every month 09.30 – 1.30pm

Montgomery House, Brookfield Court

For appointment call Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator 01233 618014

Opportunity to speak to a solicitor who will act on your behalf – need to be eligible for legal aid (please bring evidence of income to check on eligibility). By appointment only

NCH Playlink Plus

Parent & Child Drop-in and play

Mon, Tues, Thurs term time 9-12, school holidays 10-2pm

Ray Allen Centre - Tel: 01233 643103

For parents and pre-school children who have experienced domestic abuse to play and have fun together within a supportive environment

Heathside Area Plan

Heathside in Appledore has already seen tenant driven improvements to parking on the estate and fencing round the bungalows, and now it is the turn of the young people of the estate.

Working with a local designer and the Kent County Council Youth and Community team, the young people have negotiated for a youth shelter to be built on the estate and are now in the process of agreeing the design.



Bright sparks



Well done to our housing officers who claimed the trophy when Ashford, Dover and Shepway met recently for an inter-authority quiz night at Cheriton. Shepway were second and one of our own forum teams came third. With his humorous banter Barry Moss was the quiz master and our thanks

must go to him and the various organisers for arranging the evening. Fish is said to be brain food, so together with chips, what could have been better suited for our supper. A good time was had by all.



Tony May and Michelle Horn are switched on to their brand new kitchen, bathroom and new electrics, fitted in their new home as part of the regeneration of the Stanhope Neighbourhood in Ashford.

Their house marks the half way stage of the £200m regeneration of the community, with 162 families now living in newly refurbished homes like Tony and Michelle's.

Michelle, who has lived in Stanhope for 11 years, with her son Damon and partner Tony, is really pleased with her new look home, especially the wet room, which was adapted at the same time as the refurbishment was

carried out in order to cause the family as little disruption as possible.

The work is being carried out by the Chrysalis consortium, which consists of Gleeson Capital Solutions Ltd, Moat and Nationwide Commercial – together with Denne Construction and Powerminster Gleeson Services who are taking care of internal refurbishment including fitting new kitchen and

bathroom suites; electrical re-wiring; installing new boilers; adding loft insulation; upgrading walls plus the painting and tiling of kitchens and bathrooms.

Michelle commented: "I would like to say how polite and friendly the workers were and how they always cleaned up after themselves at the end of every day. We were delighted with the work they have done – it has made a big difference to our lives."

Bob Illsley, Operations Manager of Powerminster Gleeson Services in Ashford, said: "Reaching the half way stage is a great achievement for everyone involved in the successful regeneration and improvement of this area. Feedback from tenants has been extremely positive and we look forward to continuing to improve the remaining homes."

Picture left to right: Pam Millington, housing contracts manager, Colin Swain, Denne refurbishment manager, Michelle Horn, Damon and Tony May, Colin Piner, site supervisor and Bob Illsley from Powerminster Gleeson Services

Housing Surgery News

New Housing Community Surgeries

With the help of our colleagues, we have been trialling some new surgeries over the last few weeks in Hothfield, South Ashford and Willesborough. A new surgery will be starting in Bybrook Road shortly. We have had success in some areas but we are still learning what works well. Your comments and feedback will help shape the service and we are keen to make a success of the new surgeries because they are a valuable community asset. One example is our new Polish interpreter at the East Stour School Surgery in Willesborough who is helping us to reach out to parts of the community that we were unable to do so beforehand. Please see below a list of your local surgeries and times. You can not only meet your local Housing Manager at the surgeries, but also representatives of different agencies such as the Police.

THE WILLOW CENTRE,
Brookfield Road
Fortnightly on a Tuesday 9-11am
Jan 6, 20
Feb 3, 17
March 3, 17
07880 788830

FAMILY CENTRE PHEONIX SCHOOL
Bybrook Road
January
9 - 2.30-3.30pm
13 - 8.30-10.30am
23 - 2.30-3.30pm
27 - 8.30-10.30am
February
6 - 2.30-3.30pm
10 - 8.30-10.30am

20 – 2.30-3.30pm
24 – 8.30-10.30am
March
6 – 2.30-3.30pm
10 – 8.30-10.30am
20 – 2.30-3.30pm
24 – 8.30-10.30am
07879 433992

EAST STOUR SCHOOL
Earlsworth Rd
Every Thursday 2-4.30pm
07785 715250

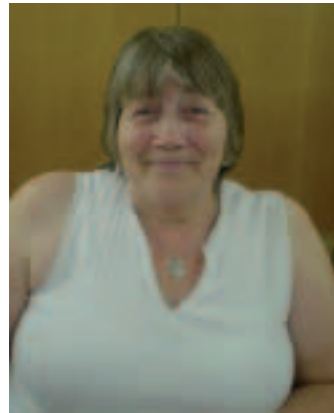
CHILDREN'S CENTRE HOTHFIELD
Every Tuesday 2-4pm
07771 976884

A-lot of veg in this allotment

Pat, Shane and James recently showed off the produce they have grown in the new Bybrook allotment, a community project forming part of the regeneration scheme for Bybrook block residents. Funding for the project came from Kent County Council via the Kennington Forum.



View from the Chair



Being Chair of the Ashford Borough Tenants Forum gives me the opportunity to attend the Housing Managers Meeting.

The meetings are held every second Thursday in the month, everything is discussed from Repairs to Contracts, Rents, Sheltered Housing, Tenant Participation, & Budgets.

Head of Housing, Tracey Kerly reports on current business and future plans. I report what the ABTF is doing and it is my opportunity to challenge things. At the monthly forum meeting I report back anything that is relevant to the forum.

Tracey attended the Tenant Forum November meeting to brief Forum Members on the proposal being considered at the moment for Ashford Housing Services to join with Shepway, Dover, Thanet, and Canterbury to form a Shared Services Vehicle for housing services. Although it is early days, there will be lots for tenants to think about and members of the Forum will be meeting with tenant representatives from the other boroughs, so that we can agree the questions we need to be asking. More information will come out in the spring newsletter, but feel free to contact me with any queries.

Stella Cowland – Chair of Ashford Borough Tenants Forum 01233 334206

Tenant events and training

Three tenants will have attended training on 'making meetings useful and fun' as this issue of Housing News goes to print, and a further two tenants will be attending a national conference on defending council housing. In January there will be newsletter training for tenants in Maidstone. If you are interested in training opportunities, please contact

**Philippa Dale 01233 330365 or
Philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk 01233 334206**

Succession

We are receiving an ever increasing number of enquiries about what happens to a tenancy should the holder of the tenancy sadly die.

The law surrounding what happens is very clear and known as 'succession'.

Every secure tenancy is able to succeed once, meaning the rights of the tenancy are passed from the deceased to a family member, but there are conditions as to who and how the tenancy is passed on:

- If a spouse or partner remains the tenancy is passed to them.
- If there is no spouse, any immediate family qualify for the tenancy if they have lived at the address continuously for at least 12 months.
- If more than one person qualifies for the tenancy, and they cannot agree who takes on the tenancy, the council will make a decision.
- While a spouse or partner succeeding to the tenancy has the right to remain in the property for as long as they wish, other qualifiers may be asked to move to a property more suited to their needs.

So if a married couple live in a 2 or 3 bed house, and the husband dies, the wife can stay in the property for as long as they wish. If a mother and son live together in a 2 or 3 bed house and the mother died then the son would have the right to a tenancy but not to the house. They would be expected to move to a smaller property, more suited to their needs. Often people wish to stay in the family home, unfortunately pressures on family units of accommodation is such that this cannot happen. In these circumstances we always give a reasonable length of time for people to adapt to their loss and give additional points on the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system to ensure they find something suitable.

One "right of succession" means that if a property has succeeded from a joint tenancy to a sole person upon a death i.e. the husband or the wife, there is absolutely no further rights for any remaining family members. We do understand that this may cause distress and in an attempt to assist we will look to re-house any remaining family members in suitable alternative accommodation.

In this scenario the rights of the individual are dramatically reduced from those outlined above because there is no legal right to remain. What is for certain though is that we will do what we can to be of assistance at this difficult time and working together we are sure we can find solutions to help most people.

Your Letters...

Dear Housing News

I am writing in to tell people some more about the Senior Forum in Ashford.

Senior Forum is for people living in sheltered accommodation. You are usually approached by people living in the unit, and are asked to represent the tenants of the unit.

We meet once a month at one of the sheltered schemes, along with members of Ashford Borough Council, we discuss various topics that have been raised, and this is then reported back to the tenants.

The discussions vary from i.e. window cleaning to car park facilities, and any other concerns that tenants may have.

We also have visits from Social Services and Kent County Council, to ask our opinions on their services.

If you feel that you could represent your sheltered unit, you can enquire with your scheme manager who will point you in the right direction.

Eileen Moon

Senior Forum Member for Farrow Court

If you feel that you could represent your sheltered unit, you can enquire with your scheme manager who will point you in the right direction.

Got something to say? Send your letters to Housing News, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL or email philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk

Competition Winners

Mrs Sampson from South Ashford was the proud winner of the Autumn competition, and very generously donated her prize money to the Pilgrim's Hospice. Mrs Sampson, who has lived in her present address since 1957 told us "I always said if I was lucky in the competition I'd pass on my luck, I hope that it helps".



Mrs Sampson receiving prize from Housing Officer Kat Aylward

Christmas Wordsearch

Words to find are: BELLS, CANDLES, CARDS, CELEBRATE, GREETINGS, HOLIDAY, JUBILEE, NOEL, PARADES, CANDY, CANES, FRUITCAKE, HAM, SWEETPOTATO, MISTLETOE, POINSETTIA, WREATH, CHRISTMASTREE, ELVES, SANTACLAUS, BLITZEN, COMET, CUPID, DANCER, DONNER, PRANCER, VIXEN, FAIRIES, NORTHPOLE, STOCKING, STUFFERS, STOCKINGS, TIDINGS, REINDEER, SLED SLEIGH, PARTY, SCROOGE, SEASON

Christmas Word Search

Winning entries received by 30 January 2009 will be entered into a prize draw for £25 in vouchers.

To enter complete the wordsearch and send to Housing News, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL



Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

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 January 2009

win £25
WORDSEARCH



Ashford Back Chat!



Calling all tenants and leaseholders...

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

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

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

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

Here's how you can get involved

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Ashford Back Chat!



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

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

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Estate Inspections |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tenants and Resident Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Mystery Shopping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Postal Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashford Borough Tenants Forum | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editorial Board | <input type="checkbox"/> Email Survey |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Feedback |

Name:

Address:

.....

Tel:

Mobile:

Email:

Terms & Conditions:

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

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

