

Winter 2007/8

# Housing NEWS

Tenant's Newsletter from Ashford Borough Council



## Christmas Crackers!

### inside:

- Who Are This Festive Bunch?
- Zero Carbon Homes Plan
- You Said, We Did!
- Meet Your New Forum Chair
- Tackling Domestic Violence
- Avoid Fuel Poverty



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to Thursday

9am – 4.30pm Friday

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8.30am-5.30pm Monday  
to Thursday

8.30am-5.30pm Friday

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01233 330625

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# editor's note

**W**here has this year gone? It doesn't seem like five minutes since we were preparing for last Christmas.

It has been quite an exciting year with Stanhope PFI finally reaching fruition, and a major regeneration project under way in Bybrook, with smaller regeneration projects being developed in other parts of the borough.

The Tenants Forum has visited (and been visited by) other boroughs including Wokingham and Brighton, in order to share ideas and best practice. As a result we are working on new ideas for estate agreements, and tenants are improving their influence over activity in their neighbourhoods, and wider housing policy.

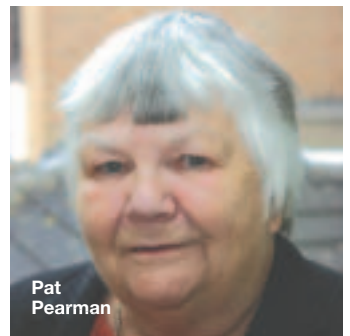
I hope you enjoy the 2008 calendar. Having photographed well over thirty community based groups for the calendars over the last three years, we decided on a change of direction, and held a competition for pictures to be used representing the 12 months. Thanks to all those who contributed.

We were hoping to have the Tenant Compact DVD ready to go out with this edition of Housing News, but we have slipped a bit with this and will aim to get it out in mid February. With the DVD will be the summary and action plan which will set out what you told us about how involved you want to be in the management of your homes.

**Philippa Dale** Editor



**Philippa Dale**



**Pat Pearman**

## You Said We Did!

**Look for this symbol throughout this and future newsletters.**

The big criticisms which came back from the Tenant Participation Compact questionnaire were that you don't think we listen to you, and that we don't keep you informed of things that are happening, whether that is feeding back your ideas which we have implemented, or letting you know when your leaking tap will be repaired.

So in an attempt to start addressing this we are going to use the You Said, We Did logo whenever we are reporting back on things you have asked about, or telling you about suggested solutions to the problems you have raised.



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**Christmas opening hours for Ashford Borough Council Customer Contacts Centre, Call Centre and Tenterden Sub-Office:**

- **Friday 21 December** - Offices open 9am-4pm. Call Centre 8.30am-4pm
- **28 December** - Offices open 9am- 4pm, Call Centre Open 8.30am-4pm
- **Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day** - Closed
- **New Year's Eve** - Offices open from 9am-4pm Call Centre 8.30am-4pm.
- **27 December** - offices open 9am- 4pm, Call Centre 8.30am- 4pm
- **New Year's Day** - Closed

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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# Zero Carbon Homes Planned



## Ashford Borough Council has announced groundbreaking plans for the South East's first "zero-carbon" affordable housing scheme.

Working in partnership with Hyde Housing Association, the council has earmarked land off Beecholme Drive, Kennington, Ashford, for 19 eco-homes. The 13 houses and six flats would include 17 affordable units for rent or shared ownership.

At this early stage a design proposal could not be offered for consultation because only the idea had been established. Residents will be able to find out more about the plans, ask questions and comment at a consultation exhibition at Bockhanger Community Centre on 7 and 8 December. The design will be developed to reflect the community's views and will be taken to the planning department for further consultation.

*In the UK almost 60 per cent of total carbon dioxide emissions are building related activities. The principal of zero carbon is that energy used to build and run the properties are balanced by sustainable construction and running features (see opposite).*

The £3 million development is subject to full council agreement, planning approval and a grant from the Housing Corporation. Hyde is investing £2.1 million of its own money into the project.

Hyde Housing Association has guaranteed that the scheme will be zero-carbon and achieve the Government's new Code for Sustainable Homes Level Four standard, Hyde will be aspiring to achieve Level Six. There are currently no other Level Four affordable housing schemes anywhere in the South East, while a Level Six scheme would be unique in the UK.

**To have your say make sure you attend the exhibition, which runs from 10am-4pm on Friday 7 December and 10am-1pm on Saturday 8 December.**

Pictured is an initial artist's impression of the scheme, which is subject to change. Copyright Avebury International Ltd.

- High levels of insulation
- Biomass central heating
- Solar-powered water heating and energy generation
- Domestic wastewater recycling and rainwater harvesting
- Reduced water usage appliances and fittings
- Sustainable drainage system
- Specialist energy management systems
- Construction materials sourced within 50 miles of the site.

**Tell us what you think. Do you feel we are doing what we can to:**

- Help provide new affordable and housing association housing in the borough
- Be at the forefront in promoting environmentally-friendly construction
- Or are we missing the point?

## Keeping Tabs On Antisocial Behaviour



### You said:

*"You were not getting feedback on reported antisocial behaviour".*

### We did:

We have recently launched a logging system to monitor antisocial behaviour in your neighbourhood. It helps to build up a clear picture of the nuisance and the action that we can use to resolve the problem. It is a useful tool, especially if the problem has resurfaced. It also allows housing officers to monitor progress and add information that is relevant to the case, and to help keep residents involved informed.

It is proving very effective in combating the issues that affect the enjoyment of your home.



**Pictured are housing officers Anthony Crossley and Kat Aylward using the new system.**

## Clean Bill Of Health



### You said:

*"The communal areas in flats were starting to look very neglected and in need of cleaning".*

### We did:

Requested costings from cleaning companies to deliver a one-off deep clean to all communal areas in blocks with four or more flats and an ongoing programme of cleaning. We hope to start this from April 2008.



# New Kitchens and Bathrooms

**You have told us you want regular updates on where we are carrying out major refurbishment works.**

Over the next three months the following roads include homes which are having kitchen and bathroom works carried out.

Those tenants affected will already be aware of the work being carried out at their property from the four year plan, which was distributed to all properties, and which shows the complete program of major works from 2005 to 2009.

	Kitchen	Bathroom
Oak Tree Road	■	
Priory Way	■	
Martin House	■	
Chessenden Lane	■	
Brookfield Road (and surrounding area)		■
Little Chequers		■
Nettlefield		■
North Pends		■
Midleton Cottages		■
Summer Leeze		■
Kingsford Close		■
Lloyds Green		■

## Name The Team And Win £25!

**Tenants have been telling us they are not sure who to contact to discuss their rent accounts or to suggest ways we can improve where they live.**

In the summer edition of Housing News we introduced our rents and estates teams. But can you remember them?

Most of our area managers are pictured on this month's front page and were all featured in the summer edition.

We've printed a few fun clues below and anyone who can correctly name them all stands a chance of winning a £25 voucher. Some managers appear elsewhere in this magazine. Past copies of Housing News can be found at [www.ashford.gov.uk/housingnews](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housingnews)

**If you're stumped, why not just give us a call on 01233 330688 and ask?**



1. This estates manager, whose areas include Bethersden, Challock, Charing, Hothfield, Ruckinge, Wye, Singleton Farm and Eastwell, shares her first name with the female comedian Mrs Brand.
2. A rolling stone gathers none of this estate manager's surname. His areas include Bockhanger, Bybrook, Kennington Lees, Newenden, Rolvenden and Tenterden.
3. .... my words, this rents manager always gets the job done.
4. This housing operations manager, who heads up the estates team, has been known to solve tenants' problems in the .... of time.
5. Our rents housing operation manager shares her surname with a Butch Hollywood legend.
6. The same film star might give a clue to the identity for our estates manager for, among others, Appledore, Hamstreet, Shadoxhurst, High Halden, Ashford town centre and Ruckley. One of his most famous roles was in ... On A Hot Tin Roof
7. Santa looks after estates issues in Aldington, Great Chart, Kenardington, Newtown, Sevington, Smeeth and South Willesborough to name a few. And he shares the name of celebrity chef Worrell-Thompson.
8. The ..... are alive with the sound of music for this rents area manager.
9. In French, this rent manager's surname translates as bois blanc.
10. The work of the rents team is never done but this manager is never afraid to dig-in and go that extra mile.

## Name The Team and win: £25!

**Name the members of the Rents and Estates team for your chance to win a £25 voucher:**

1	
2	
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10	

Name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Tel No:	
Email:	
Past copies of Housing News can be found at <a href="http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housingnews">www.ashford.gov.uk/housingnews</a> If you're stumped, why not just give us a call on 01233 330688 and ask?	
Entries should be sent to Name the Team Competition, Housing News, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL. Deadline January 15.	



## Learning From Each Other

**Tenants and housing staff from Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone, Thanet, and Dover joined forces in September to receive training on how to improve their communities.**

Trainer David Liggins provided lots of information about the theory of working in partnership to create effective agreements that residents are happy to sign up to. A few days later some of those who learned the theory were able to see the practice when they went on a field trip to Brighton to visit two communities which had estate agreements in place.

They were able to talk to local people and received presentations from police, the Probation Service and local housing providers in order to understand how estate agreements can work on the ground.

Ashford Borough Tenants Forum member Robin Bateman said of the Saunders Park

Estate Agreement: *"Residents have taken on the management and ownership of community centres and run communal gardens and allotments.*

*"Estate management, street cleaning and refuse disposal providers have been involved in drawing up operating agreements which suit local people. Communities have negotiated service level agreements with local councils to make sure residents can afford to use leisure centres.*

*"Some tenants have set up their own community transport or car-sharing schemes to improve access from isolated neighbourhoods to central facilities - a particularly important issue in rural communities. There are estate agreements where residents control some aspects of local housing management with their landlord."*

### Come & Learn

There will be an opportunity to find out about courses for the New Year at The Ray Allen Skills Plus Centre on 10 and 17 December between 10am and 3pm

Do you want to improve your IT skills, relaxation classes, counselling, confidence building or interview skills? Drop in at the centre, in Stanhope, have a coffee and biscuit and find out more. Contact Jude Farrell on 01233 208619 or 07941 141649.

### Choice Based Lettings Newsletter via Email

If you're on the housing register and have housing needs points then, in the future, you may be able to receive your fortnightly Choice Based Lettings Property Newsletter via email instead of through the post.

If you would prefer to receive it this way, you should send an email to Donna.Michael@ashford.gov.uk and tell her your Housing Registration number.

## Paying Your Rent Over Christmas

**We all know what an expensive time Christmas can be but you should never use this as reason to miss rent payments.**

Rent arrears are a serious matter and whatever the time of year the income team are obliged to take action for non-payment.

If you have a clear rent account on 14 December 2007, then you are entitled to two rent free weeks at Christmas, (weeks commencing 17 December 2007, and 24 December 2007). However if you are in rent arrears, you will have to pay your rent during this period, plus any additional

amount towards clearing your rent arrears. Despite this we would still rather you speak to us if you are getting into difficulties with your rent. The earlier you contact us the better, and any of the area managers are able to make arrears payment arrangements, which you should find manageable.

**In the meantime there are lots of ways to pay your rent:**

**Are you using the most convenient way to pay your rent?**

- Online via your own online banking
- Online via: [www.ashford.gov.uk/payments](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/payments)
- By Direct Debit or Bank Order
- Scan Coin machines found at the Civic Centre and Gateway
- Post Office, PayPoint or Pay Zone
- Calling the Housing Services Team 01233 330688
- Using the automated payments option by calling 01233 330625

# Meet The New Chair

**I'm Teri Witcher. I'm retired and have lived in the borough over 30 years. I have been a member of Ashford Borough Tenants Forum for six years and was elected Chair at our last AGM in September. I would like to see more Tenants at our next AGM meeting in 2008, so watch out for details in Housing News next year.**

A lot has been achieved in that time, such as the annual budget for the maintenance plan. We the tenants have benefitted with a choice of tiles and colour for our kitchens and bathrooms etc. A great deal has been achieved in sheltered housing. The community police are in most areas. Dave the handyman has proved most successful and area plans are resulting in great improvements to our communities.

One of my jobs is to attend monthly Housing Services management meetings. All aspects of the service are discussed, such as budgeting and planning. This provides a good opportunity for me to put your views forward but I cannot do this without your help.

The Forum members have put a lot of effort and time in over the years and would like to hear from you. Send in your views, criticisms – whatever. I would like to hear from all age groups and nationalities. My email is [teriwtent@btinternet.com](mailto:teriwtent@btinternet.com), or write to me C/O Ashford Borough Council.

The Forum has been working very hard with an independent tenant adviser since the summer to review the Tenant Participation



Compact. We sent an all-tenant questionnaire and got a good response. This has helped us create a new and challenging action plan for tenants, housing staff, councillors and other agencies to work together to improve the service we as council tenants and leaseholders receive.

Some of the main areas for work are improving communication, and in particular making sure the council feeds back the results of any action, making sure all tenants are given a real opportunity to say wherever they live in the borough.

The compact is taking the form of a DVD and a paper summary, and although all the preparation has been done we have had some technical problems and the final pack will be coming out to tenants in the middle of February.

*Teri*

## An Easier Way To Swap Your Home



**Housing Services has recently partnered with HomeSwapper to offer you an online option for finding a home to swap yours with.**

The online system went live on 1 November and was followed by a launch day where a member of Housing Services and someone from HomeSwapper were on hand at the Gateway to offer assistance.

The online system has the ability to property match on your behalf and can send you text or email alerts once it has found a potential swap.

You would then use the usual system of a mutual exchange application form to have the potential move agreed by your respective landlords.

If you weren't able to attend the launch day and don't have access to a computer then there is free internet access available at both the Gateway and at the Civic Centre where you can sign up and view potential swaps.

The mutual exchange book system will still be kept for anybody outside of the borough who wants to move in and a paper copy of the HomeSwapper records will also be made available at the Civic Centre.

**Lettings officer Vicky Hammond (left) is pictured with a customer during the HomeSwapper launch day.**

## Get Covered

When moving into a new home there is a lot to remember. Often the first thing that is forgotten is the importance of contents insurance. Remembering to take out insurance is vitally important to protect your valuable possessions either from theft or accident.

The council's insurance covers the bricks and mortar of the property but does not cover your belongings. Contents insurance may seem an unnecessary expense but in a time of crisis it may prove invaluable. It can also cover decoration costs, damage to soft furnishing and clothes in the event of a water leak.

If you don't have contents insurance please give it careful consideration as the council will not be able to help. Many of the providers accept monthly payments and a bit of shopping around might find a policy that is good for you. You may be surprised at how affordable it is and at some time it may prove to be invaluable.

# Greener Council Houses

**Ashford Borough Council has targeted a 20 per cent reduction in the carbon consumption of its housing stock by 2013.**

Energy-saving and eco-friendly initiatives have already resulted in a 918-tonne drop in carbon dioxide output from the council's stock of 4,731 homes in the last two years.

The council is committed to managing its housing through sustainable practices such as using renewable power sources, energy efficiency, water use reduction and recycling.

Around 30 per cent of homes have been fitted with new boilers which increase household energy efficiency by 20 per cent and cut running costs by around 35 per cent. In 2005/06 the work resulted in a reduction of 564 tonnes of carbon dioxide and last year around 354 tonnes. Average fuel costs reduced from £342.50 to £213.25 over the period.

All properties are double glazed and fitted with cavity wall and loft insulation, which have already had a financial impact on our tenants. Installation of low-energy light bulbs in vacant properties is about to begin.

Renewable energy forms are being trialed in our sheltered housing units, ranging from solar heating and electricity generation to pioneering devices at Oakleigh House, which extract heat from the air and pump it into the building.

As part of the strategy the council's maintenance contractors will be required to use sustainable sources and recycle waste materials.

Water butts are being supplied and fitted in around 120 properties a year while the council is also fitting toilet cisterns which use less water and flow regulators on taps.

Peter Wood, executive portfolio holder for housing, said: *"Environment and climate change issues are rightly at the top of the agenda. As a local authority we have a duty to be leading on sustainability issues and operating the very best practices within our resources."*

## Spooky Fun At Pym House!

**Everyone had a great time at Pym House Halloween party. Lots of people joined in the fun and dressed for the occasion and the pumpkin went down well. Residents were entertained with games and music.**



### Bybrook and Bockhanger Community Group AGM

**More than 50 people attended a lively meeting at Bockhanger Community Hall in November.**

This was the residents' first opportunity to quiz Ashford Housing Service's Research and Development Manager, Charlotte Lonsdale on the proposed development on Beecholme Drive (see page 2) and those attending made it clear that the proposals are not universally popular. Consultation is starting in earnest in December.

Other speakers were Rob Juniper, headteacher at Phoenix School, who explained how the redevelopment of the school was progressing, and offered real partnership with the community group. Sergeant Geoff Lawrence spoke about community policing.



# Tackling Domestic Violence

**One of the more unfortunate side effects of Christmas is the increase in domestic violence which accompanies most public holidays.**

A combination of financial worries, alcohol consumption and other seasonal family stresses can see tempers boil over and lead to an increased caseload for professionals like Kate Turner, Ashford Borough Council's domestic violence prevention officer.

Based within Housing Services, Kate offers advice and works on behalf of victims of domestic violence in Ashford and Maidstone. Sometimes clients are referred by the police and other agencies but Kate can also be approached directly by victims.

She said: "There is no need for people to suffer in silence. Victims may feel very isolated but actually there is a lot of help out there."

Working closely with police officers and other relevant organisations, Kate helps victims to avoid further domestic violence through a range of potential solutions. Initially that often means assisting in securing court orders against abusive partners.

Another service is the Sanctuary Project, which involves creating a safe room in the victim's house where they can lock a reinforced door and summon immediate help through a panic alarm. Security modifications could also include installation of spy-holes, lighting and additional door and window locks.

A 12-week course called the Freedom Programme aims to help women better understand the causes and effects of domestic violence, how to recognise abusive partners and how to improve their self esteem and quality of life.

Kate said: "Many of the people who go on the course describe it as life-changing."

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

She added: "We have good contacts with the refuges but in terms of permanent accommodation this is much more of a challenge. Everyone knows there is a shortage of available housing and simply relocating is not always the best answer. Of course in some cases it is the only viable option and we have had to relocate people to the other side of the country for their own safety."

**If you are a victim of domestic violence and need help you can call 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 0808 2000 247.**

**In emergencies you should call the police on 999.**



## New Patios

### You said:

*Bungalow residents at Heathside, Appledore, said they wanted patios.*

### We did:

We obliged. Here's Mrs Holdstock proudly showing her new sun terrace to area manager Barry Moss.

## Out & About

**Area Managers will be out and about on Estate Inspections on the following dates and are really keen for you to join them so that you can explain what you think is important for your neighbourhood.**

You said we don't listen to you – please come to the estate inspection in your area and help us start to put this right.

For times and meeting points, ring the estate Area Managers - Barry, Jo, Kat, or Anthony on 01233 330376.

The dates for the Stanhope estate inspections will be set shortly, and will be advertised in the Moat newsletter which will be received by Stanhope residents just before Christmas.



## Estate Inspection Timetable

Week beginning	Location
10 December	Godfrey Walk
17 December	Brookfield A
7 January	Woodchurch / Bethersden
14 January	Brookfield B
21 January	Brookfield C
28 January	Aldington / Bilsington / Ruckinge / Hamstreet
4 February	Rothbrook ( Kennington )
11 February	Newtown Green / South Willesborough
18 February	Warehorne / Kennardington / Appledore / Stone / Ebony
25 February	Twelve Acres
3 March	Repton Manor / Poet's Corner
10 March	Rolvenden / Newenden



# Pupils Benefit from Stanhope Regeneration

**Maths pupils from Beaver Green primary school have been learning about construction techniques from the developers of the Stanhope estate regeneration project.**

A year five group of 26 pupils visited one of the sites being developed by Denne Construction to hear from project manager Richard Hall about the use of concrete at the scheme.

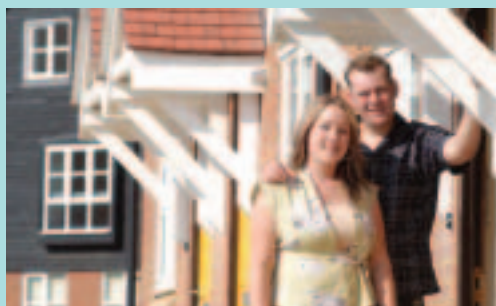
The students got the opportunity to place the four different concrete mixes into cubes for strength testing, and also into the formwork pieces that had been prepared for the day.

At the end of the site visit the pupils were presented with a Certificate of Excellence by Denne Construction Manager for the Stanhope development, Chris Goddard.

The activity is part of a wider project set up by Denne in partnership with the National Skills Council, providing training and learning for local people linked to the construction project.

In April Ashford Borough Council agreed a groundbreaking Private Finance Initiative contract with the Chrysalis consortium to regenerate the estate over the next five years.

**The work will involve replacing seven remaining blocks of flats with more than 400 new homes for rent, shared ownership or sale on the open market. Denne is currently building a new commercial centre on Stanhope.**



## Commitment To Sustainable Housing Development

**Ashford Borough Council has signed-up to a countywide commitment to ensure new affordable housing developments are sustainable communities where people want to live and work.**

The Sustainable Communities Protocol has been developed by the Kent Housing Group, a

partnership of local authorities, registered social landlords, The Government Office of the South East (GOSE) and the Housing Corporation.

Proposals for new affordable housing developments will be measured against a sustainability checklist as part of the protocol. It seeks to ensure developments provide a mix of household type and tenure and meet the housing needs of local people. Access to facilities and essential services such as shops, transport, schools, health and leisure, community development opportunities and jobs will also be considered.

Cllr Peter Wood, portfolio holder for housing, said: "There is a huge growth agenda being delivered in Ashford and we must ensure that new affordable housing developments are not isolated ghettos but vibrant, integrated, inclusive, environmentally sound and economically active communities."

**Ashford Borough Council is working with partners to provide 968 high-quality affordable homes in the borough by 2010.**

## Improving Services

Tenants and Tenant Involvement staff from round South East Kent met to agree a range of measures which can be used by landlords to monitor their performance, and also to enable them to compare themselves with other similar organisations.

Factors considered included cost and resources, general participation, communication and consultation and training.

This will be another way we can monitor and improve services and tenants have been integral to the process.

# Avoid 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.**

The latest available estimates suggest that some two million households in the UK in 2004 were in fuel poverty and had difficulty in keeping their homes warm at an acceptable level of cost.

Fuel poverty is caused by a number of factors including poor energy efficiency in the home, the cost of energy and low incomes. Those in lower income brackets are more susceptible to fuel poverty as they are more likely to pay a greater proportion of their income on fuel and keeping warm.

**There are lots of simple things both landlord and tenant can do to help. Here are our top ten tips that will cost you nothing.**



1. If you're too warm then turn down your thermostat by a degree. This can cut up to 10 per cent off your fuel bills
2. Water should not be heated to a scalding temperature. Normally, adjusting the cylinder thermostat to 60°C will be adequate
3. Remember to draw your curtains when it gets dark to stop heat escaping
4. Always remember to turn off the lights when you leave a room and so reduce running costs
5. Don't waste energy by leaving appliances on standby unnecessarily

6. 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
7. 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

8. Don't put really wet clothes into the tumble dryer; wring them out first. Better still dry them outside if you can. When possible use the low-temperature programme on dishwashers
9. 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.
10. Don't over fill the kettle for just one drink; heat the amount of water you really need.

## Help Us Beat The Cheats

**Ashford Borough Council has appealed to tenants for help in beating benefits cheats.**

Councillor Paul Bartlett, deputy leader of the council, said: "Many people see benefit fraud as a victimless crime but that is very far from the truth.

"Every penny dishonestly or illegally claimed from Ashford Borough Council in Council Tax and Housing Benefit comes directly from the public purse.

"It's money which we would much rather be spending on improving our services to the public. By robbing the system benefit cheats are robbing their neighbours and every Council Tax payer in the borough."

Ashford Borough Council has access to information held by agencies including

the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs and runs a monthly data match search to help trace fraud.

Cllr Bartlett added: "There is no escape for people committing benefit fraud. We are robust in our action and, as has been demonstrated, the court penalties can be severe.

"We have access to a range of personal information and once we have detected a fraud we will not let it go. All monies illegally claimed have to be paid back."

**If you are aware of a benefit cheat then you can call the Ashford Borough Council hotline on 08000 262456 giving as much details as possible or phone the council direct on 01233 330453. All calls are treated in confidence.**

### Climate Change Working Group

**We are all worried about climate change and the effects it will have on us. We know we need to reduce our carbon footprint. What are we doing as a council?**

We want to take the lead in our community in reducing carbon emissions. That's why we have signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change commitments earlier this year; which generally means working with central government to contribute, at a local level, delivery of the UK Climate Change Programme, the Kyoto Protocol and the target for carbon dioxide reduction by 2010.

To make a good start the council has had a carbon audit carried out by Creative Environmental Networks, which will give us a carbon management plan. A climate change working group has also been set up to make sure the council is able to meet its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.



# Tell Us All About You

**We have recently piloted our tenant profile, "Learning' Listening and Visiting," in Kennington asking each of our tenants to complete a short individual household profile.**



These profiles are going to help us to improve and build the services we provide to you. The profile asks questions about the best ways to talk to you, learn from you and visit you and your family.

We will be rolling the tenant profile out to the whole borough in the New Year and will be offering a variety of incentives to complete and return the profile to us. These will include cash prizes and we are pleased to congratulate Ms McCauly our first incentive winner. She is pictured with Tenant Participation Officer Philippa Dale after receiving a cheque for £200.

Philippa said: "We have had a good response so far but want to get 100 per cent of our tenants to give us this information. Area managers will be following-up the forms with home visits where we get no response."

# Wordsearch Winner

The winner of last month's spooky Housing News Halloween wordsearch competition was Hilda Farmer, of Kennington, who is pictured receiving her voucher from Ashford Borough Council's Rob Hustwayte.



# Ashford's Firefighters dreaming of a quiet Christmas

**Last December local firefighters dealt with 25 fires. But Station Commander Lee Rose is hoping for even fewer calls this year.**

"We have been working hard to raise fire safety awareness and the importance of installing a smoke detector in your home. We hope this hard work will come to fruition with even less calls this year, and that even more people in the borough will have an enjoyable, safe and incident free Christmas and New Year.

Follow this simple advice and help make your local firefighters' wish come true.



**Candles** – Tea lights and candles are more popular than ever. Make sure you use a firmly secured candle holder on a heat resistant surface. Keep them away from items which may catch fire and out of the reach of children and pets. Never move them once lit and make sure you extinguish them when you leave the room.

**Christmas Lights** – Lights which have been coiled up in storage all year need thorough testing. Look for broken or exposed wires. When buying new lights make sure they conform to British safety standards. Check where they can be used – don't use indoor lights outside. Always be alert for danger signs such as hot plugs and sockets, scorch marks and fuses that blow for no apparent reason. Remember one plug, one socket is always best rather than lots of adapters.



**Open Fires** – Nothing says Christmas more than a roaring log fire. Take a few precautionary measures and you'll make sure the only thing going on your fire will be logs and coal not water from a fireman's hose. Have your chimney swept before the celebrations and at least once a year. Don't overload the grate and only burn suitable fuels. Use a fire guard to prevent sparks jumping out and regardless of the romantic Christmas image never hang your stocking from the mantelpiece in front of an open fire.

**Don't Drink and Cook** – while the task of cooking Christmas dinner is enough to drive anyone to drink remember alcohol can seriously affect your judgment, especially if faced with an emergency such as a kitchen fire. Don't leave cooking unattended and keep your hob and grill grease free. Keep oven gloves, tea towels and paper towels away from the cooker. Many fire deaths are alcohol related please don't become one of our statistics.

**For more information visit:**  
[www.kent.fire-uk.org](http://www.kent.fire-uk.org) or call the Community Fire Safety Team on: 01233 646809



**Kent Fire & Rescue Service**

**Mark Your Gifts**  
Valuable Christmas gifts such as bikes, satnav systems, computers or power tools can be marked and put onto an international security register for just £2.50. Ashford Community Safety Unit works in partnership with Kent Police to offer the property marking service. The marks act as a deterrent to thieves and mean recovered items can be traced and reunited with their owners. For information call 01233 330892.



# 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](http://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:**

- Monitoring groups
- Tenants and Resident Groups
- Focus Groups
- Ashford Borough Tenants Forum
- Editorial Board
- Estate Inspections
- Mystery Shopping
- Postal Survey
- Telephone Survey
- Email Survey
- 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.**

