

WINTER 2011/2012

Housing NEWS

TENANTS' & LEASEHOLDERS' NEWSLETTER FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL






Bloomin' marvellous!



ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Inside:

-  Affordable housing news
-  Sure Start in Wye
-  New youth facility



Council contacts

Housing services team

Tel: 01233 330688

Email: 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

Telephone Stella Cowland:

01233 334206

Housing News

Editor: Philippa Dale

Telephone: 01233 330365

Email: philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk

Housing News is printed on paper made from managed sustainable sources.

www.ashford.gov.uk



Join the ABTF Facebook group at Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum.
Email: abctfg@yahoo.co.uk



Barry receiving plaques at the rare breeds centre

Garden competition winners receive plaques

Following the success of the garden competition in the summer, winners received beautiful pottery plaques designed and made by the Rainbow Gallery at the Rare Breeds Centre. Here we see senior area manager Barry Moss collecting the plaques prior to distribution.

We will be running the garden competition again in 2012, so look out for the entry form in the spring issue of Housing News, and get gardening!

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.



Rent free weeks

If you have a clear rent account on the 18 December, 2011, you will be entitled to two rent free weeks over the Christmas period.

Please be aware that if you pay your rent by monthly direct debit or use our monthly standing order payment method, your rent free weeks will have already been included in the calculation of your monthly payments.

Contents

- 4 Fuel poverty - are you putting yourself at risk?
- 5 Having problems with your neighbours?
- 8 Affordable housing news
- 10 Anti-social behaviour training
- 13 Sure Start in Wye
- 14 Matt and Lisa raise £500 for Macmillan
- 15 New youth facility



Cover Picture: Bloomin' marvellous!

Housing News has been designed and produced by Xi Design, Hythe
Tel: 01303 770729 www.dxin.co.uk

Printed by: Headley Brothers Ltd, Ashford
Tel: 01233 623131 www.headley.co.uk

Christmas and New Year opening hours

	Gateway	ABC CSA & Housing in Gateway	Tenterden	Call Centre	Civic Centre Reception	TIC in Gateway
Fri 23rd	9 - 6	9 - 4	9 - 5.30	8.30 - 4	8.30 - 5	10.15 - 3
Sat 24th	9 - 1	9 - 1	9 - 1	Closed	Closed	10 - 1
Sun 25th	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Mon 26th	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Tues 27th	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Wed 28th	9 - 8	Closed	9 - 5.30	Closed	Closed	Closed
Thurs 29th	9 - 8	9 - 4	9 - 5.30	8.30 - 4	8.30 - 5	10.15 - 3
Fri 30th	9 - 6	9 - 4	9 - 5.30	8.30 - 4	8.30 - 5	10.15 - 3
Sat 31st	9 - 4	9 - 1	9 - 4	Closed	Closed	10 - 3
Sun 1st	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Mon 2nd	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed

Block and landscape monitors

In the last issue of Housing News we asked for tenants and leaseholders who would be willing to provide regular feedback on cleaning and landscape services so that we could have a consistent way of measuring performance.

The idea is to work with the existing cleaning contractors, but to have a possible role in agreeing the level of service that will be introduced when the landscaping contract is retendered in 2012.

Thank you to those who stepped up and were contacted, but we need more of you. Although you may be asked to attend a very straightforward training session, all you will be asked to do apart from this is record your score on the performance of the contractors on a pro forma weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on where you live.

If you would be interested or would like more information, contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365 philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk

Let's clean up!



On one of the only sunny Saturdays in September residents, councillors, and staff from Ashford housing and cultural services, Affinity Sutton Housing Association, Sure Start, Hang 10, and Kent Fire and Rescue turned out in force to 'work and play' in Hackfield and Cressfield.

In the morning everyone rolled up their sleeves and donned high visibility jackets to pick up litter, paint goal posts and fencing, and cleaned off graffiti. In the afternoon a bouncy castle and children's activities meant that mums and dads could relax and check out their handy work.

Although this event took some planning and involved a number of agencies, it was the residents who made it such a success. If you would like a similar event to be arranged in your area let us know.

As Mrs Stevens said, "It was hard work but felt really good – I love the play area fence."

Fuel poverty – are you putting yourself at risk as fuel costs rise?

Firefighters warn of added winter fire dangers

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is warning of potential fire hazards as households feel the pinch of domestic fuel increases and switch to alternative ways of keeping warm over the long winter months.

Research shows that those most at risk are people who live alone on a low income, with older people or single-parent families amongst the most vulnerable.

Director of community safety Steve Griffiths said: "With the rise in gas and electricity prices, some residents may struggle to make ends meet and there is

real concern they may resort to more risky methods of heating and lighting their homes, resulting in more accidental fires.

"I appeal to all residents to ensure you have working smoke alarms fitted in your property to provide early warning of fire, and to think very carefully before taking a cost-cutting risk that could result in you getting seriously injured or killed in a fire.

"Also, consider installing a carbon monoxide detector to help prevent to you and your loved-ones from the risk of carbon-monoxide poisoning."

Common cost-cutting risks that could take your life are...

- Burning wood or other fossil fuels in open fires stoves with chimneys or flues that have not been used, swept or inspected – make sure they are checked and swept before use.
- Using old and potentially faulty portable heaters and oil or paraffin stoves – such devices are particularly hazardous in the home, especially if positioned close to furniture or upholstery. Ensure any electric or gas heater is fully inspected and fit for use and never use them to dry washing.
- Using old or poorly stored electric blankets - never use an electric blanket that is over 10-years-old and always ensure you follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Using candles and paraffin lamps for lighting instead of switching on the lights – never leave naked flames unattended and exercise extreme caution if burning other fuels.
- Using Calor gas stoves or barbecues indoors to cook with – these items should never be used indoors as they are a serious fire hazard and create deadly toxic fumes. Only use cooking appliances intended for use indoors.



If you have concerns about keeping yourself or a friend or relative safe from fire or would like further advice call Kent Fire and Rescue Service for free on 0800 923 7000 or go to www.kent.fire-uk.org.

Health checks and free* CO alarms for solid fuel appliances



Risks of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning are often associated with gas appliances but the risk of CO exposure is said to be up to 10 times higher from a faulty solid fuel appliance. In fact any source of heat using fossil fuels has the potential to generate CO.

Solid fuel appliances should have an annual safety check, flues must be cleaned at least once a year and throat plates checked and cleaned monthly.

Appliances installed by ABC have the flues swept annually and the appliances checked once per year. Tenants are expected to check throat plates regularly. ABC will be ensuring that CO alarms have been fitted in rooms with appliances it maintains.

For tenants that have installed their own solid fuel appliances, ABC is offering a free safety check of their appliance and the fitting of a battery powered CO alarm which will require no maintenance for six years.

*This offer is limited to 50 tenants that will be selected at random from those that apply. If you wish to apply for this offer please phone 01233 330688 or email: planned.maintenance@ashford.gov.uk quoting "CO ALARMS" and give your name address and contact number. The closing date for applications will be the 1 February 2012.



Calendar doubles up as annual report to tenants

Your 2012 calendar is enclosed and, for the second year running, it incorporates the annual report to tenants.

We consulted a wide cross-section of residents through Housing News, at community events and at group meetings over the summer, and the annual report includes the local offers which you told us you want to see continue or put into practice over the coming year. You also told us that you like the larger format.

The images this year are all views of council estates – although you may not recognise them. Area Manager Anthony Crossley had fun snapping whilst he was out and about across the borough!



Having problems with your neighbours?



Then why not consider mediation?

Kate Robson, operations manager for Ashford Mediation Service says, "There are many causes of disputes between neighbours, ranging from loud music, noisy parties and parking issues to boundary disputes and anti-social behaviour. If you are experiencing problems with your neighbours, then Ashford Mediation Service would like to offer you help.

"Mediation is a process that allows individuals to find mutually beneficial solutions to problems, which they are struggling to find themselves. Our mediators act as peace makers between both parties. They are ordinary men and women who have been professionally trained to help solve problems that require mediation. They are all volunteers and do not take sides or make judgements about the rights or wrongs in any situation.

"Everything that is discussed is confidential, mediators are totally impartial, and non-judgemental, and the service is completely independent and free of charge.

"If you are interested in our service then please ring or e-mail us, and ask as many questions as you wish. If you decide to try mediation we will arrange for two of our mediators to visit you at home, to hear your account of what's happened. If you agree, they will then offer to visit the other party (who has a right to refuse, of

course) to hear their view of the situation. If both parties are willing, a face to face meeting may be arranged at a neutral place, where you both can meet, with the mediators, to come to an agreed solution.

"We are also currently looking for new volunteer mediators, so if you enjoy helping people, live in the Ashford area and are a good listener then this may be the volunteering job for you. Volunteering can be very flexible, so it is a great opportunity for someone who wants to become a volunteer, to fit it around work and family. If you would like to take up this rewarding opportunity, please get in touch!"

Ashford Mediation Service
The Annexe,
Tufton Street,
Ashford,
Kent TN23 1BT

Tel: 01233 663488
e-mail: info@ashfordmediation.co.uk
www.ashfordmediation.co.uk



Estate inspections

If your street or village is listed below, why or ring us and we will arrange to meet

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

Estate inspection times, dates, and meeting points

Brook at 12.30pm on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at Brook Bank

Chilham at 10.30am on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at Felborough Close

Crundale at 11.30am on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at Swedish House

Godmersham at 11am on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at Purr Wood

Hastingleigh at 12pm on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at the Becketts Close

Old Wives Lees at 10am on Monday 30 April
 Meeting at The Paddocks

South Willlesborough at 10am on Monday 6 February
 Meeting at Herbert Road

Tenants choice at 10am on Monday 19 March
 You tell us where we need to inspect or we will revisit an area we think needs extra attention.



Anthony Crossley

Contact the Stanhope Centre on 012133 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*
 24 Jan, 16 Feb, 20 March, and 24 April

Bredgar Close
 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 30 March, and 27 April

Brenchley Close
 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 30 March, and 27 April

Crundale Close
 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 29 March, and 26 April

Eastry Close
 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 29 March, and 26 April

Frittenden Close
 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 30 March, and 27 April

Kilndown Close*
 24 Jan, 16 Feb, 20 March, and 24 April

Leaveland Close
 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 30 March, and 27 April

Luddenham Close
 5 Jan, 9 Feb, 8 March, and 5 April

Lynsted Close
 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 29 March, and 26 April

Newenden Close
 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 30 March, and 27 April

Otterden Close*
 20 Jan, 14 Feb, 24 March, and 27 April

Sheldwich Close
 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 29 March, and 26 April

Speldhurst Close*
 20 Jan, 14 Feb, 24 March, and 27 April

*These are the correct dates, please ignore the dates in the calendar.



Tracy Bratten, Andrew Brackley and Naureen Ullah

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

Estate inspection times, dates, and meeting points

Brookfield West at 10am on Monday 16 April
 Meeting at 139-141 Beaver Lane

Bybrook and Bockhanger at 10am on Monday 5 March
 Meeting at Jubilee House

Newtown Green at 10am on Monday 28 May
 Meeting at the post office

Poets Corner at 11am on Monday 23 January
 Meeting at Kipling Road

Repton Manor at 10am on Monday 23 January
 Meeting at Littlebrook Close



Paul Hills



Stella Cowland Forum Chair and other residents on an estate inspection

not come along to show us the things that are concerning you? You can either turn up at the meeting point at the time stated, you anywhere around the inspection area. We will ring and remind you if you have ever been on an inspection in the past.

Area manager
Claire Wood
 01233 330379
 claire.wood@ashford.gov.uk

Estate inspection times, dates, and meeting points

Brookfield East at 10am on Monday 23 April

Meeting at Lewis Court

Hothfield at 10am on Monday 12 March

Meeting at Coach Drive

Newenden at 10am on Mon 30 Jan

Meeting at Copt Hall

Rolvenden at 11am on Mon 30 Jan

Meeting at Sparkeswood Avenue

Wittersham at 12pm on Mon 30 Jan

Meeting at Lloyds Green



Claire Wood

Every estate inspection is attended by a trained member 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 times, dates, and meeting points

Appledore at 11am on Mon 9 Jan

Meeting at Heathside

Ebony at 10am on Mon 9 Jan

Meeting at Ebony Cottages

Godfrey Walk at 10am on Mon 2 April

Meeting at Pound House

Great Chart at 11am on Mon 20 Feb

Meeting at Middle Close

Kennardington at 12pm on Mon 9 Jan

Meeting at The Wish

Kingsnorth at 10.30am on Mon 20 Feb

Meeting at Riverside Close

Rothbrook at 10am on Mon 14 May

Meeting at Rothbrook Drive

Shadoxhurst at 10am on Mon 20 Feb

Meeting at Nairne Close

Stone at 10.30am on Mon 9 Jan

Meeting at Oxney Cottages

Warehorne at 12.30pm on Mon 9 Jan

Meeting at Glebe Villas



Sam Diggins

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

Estate inspection times, dates, and meeting points

Charing at 10.30am on Tues 10 April

Meeting at Downs Way

Charing Heath at 10am on Tues 10 April

Meeting at Wind Hill

Clockhouse at 10am on Mon 27 Feb

Meeting at Clockhouse

Hillbrow at 10.30am on Mon 27 Feb

Meeting at Meadowsweet House

Tenterden on Monday 21 May

Meeting at Shrubscote at 10am, Pittlesden at 11am and Longfield at 12pm

Twelve Acres at 10am on Mon 16 Jan

Meeting at 10 Twelve Acres



Ollie Samways

New area manager being appointed shortly

Estate inspection dates and meeting points

Brookfield North at 10am on Tuesday 8 May

Meeting at Jemmett Road

Hampden at 10am on Mon 13 Feb

Meeting at Hampden Road

Woolreeds at 10am on 26 March

Meeting at St Stephens Walk

Affordable housing news

During the past few months, more affordable housing was delivered in the borough with six local needs homes for rent completed at Greenside, High Halden and a further eight in Sunley Gardens, Godmersham by English Rural Housing Association and 11 affordable homes handed over at Park Farm and Hunter Avenue, to West Kent Housing Association.

The Homes and Communities Agency is working with a number of our housing association partners to sign contracts to develop more affordable housing under the new programme, which will run until 2015. It is projected that about 500 homes will be delivered in Ashford over the next four years.

English Rural Housing Association was awarded £8,000 from the Kent Housing Group Innovation Fund to make a DVD to encourage local authorities, parish councils and housing associations to deliver more local needs housing, to help maintain a balanced supply of housing in the rural areas.



Fiona Sunley opens Sunley Gardens Godmersham with English Churches chief executive Adrian Maunders and chairman Mike Haslam OBE

'Valuing people' in Sotherton

The scheme at Sotherton has been built to provide long term accommodation for people with learning disabilities. The scheme comprises four one bedroom flats and one single bedroom bungalow, all for social rent.

The scheme will provide independent living, supporting the 'valuing people' vision that people with learning disabilities have the right to be full members of the society in which they live, to choose where they live and what they do, and to be as independent as they wish to be.

The Senior Practitioner from the Ashford Community Learning Disability Team said, "Too few people with learning disabilities have a choice as to where they live or with whom, and too few have homes of their own, with rights as tenants or owners, compared to the general adult population. This project opens choices to people with a learning disability in Ashford and gives vulnerable people the opportunity to live independent lives with the support they need.

"The properties will enable individuals to live in their own home town and to maintain regular contact with their friends, families and their daily activities and social clubs.

"This has been an excellent example of partnership between the Ashford Community Learning Disability Team and Ashford Borough Council Housing working together to create local housing options that



One of the new tenants, Chloe, and her care manager Helen look round Chloe's new flat with Barry Moss

give more choice and control to people with a learning disability."

Before the planning application was submitted, a consultation event was held (using the Kent County Council mobile Gateway to be as near to the proposed site as possible) and members of the community learning disability team, their clients, and housing officers were available to answer any questions about the project.

The homes were advertised on Kent Homechoice in July and a panel of representatives from housing and the community learning disability team assessed the applications. The properties were advertised well in advance of their completion date in November to allow the successful applicants time, together with family and care managers, to prepare for moving into their new homes.

Bethersden new build

Three two bedroom bungalows in Bethersden have been handed over to local people who have given up much needed family accommodation which will in turn will go to families in housing need. Preference will be given to people with a local connection to Bethersden.

Patricia Batt who completed an assisted move from a council house in Bethersden said: "I am pleased that the decision was made to build new bungalows in the village as they were much needed for the elderly and disabled. I am very grateful for all the help that Ashford Borough Council has given me with the move."

Below: Patricia Batt receiving keys from Kay Devereaux





Consultation on planned maintenance

How we consult at the moment

We always let you know about any necessary planned maintenance work that is due, and we usually send you a letter.

Most 'indoors' work is offered to improve or modernise your home. It is up to you whether you have the work done or not. If you want to have the work done, we visit and talk through the proposals with you.

By doing this we can:

- Outline the work, so that you know what can or can't be done
- Give you an idea of the likely disruption you can expect
- Tell you what (if anything) you need to do; to cooperate with the contractor
- Find out if there are any specific considerations we need to take into account

Most of our 'outdoors' work is to maintain the structure and there is usually no choice; you have to have the work done. At the moment, we don't really consult with you, other than to tell you the works are going ahead. Because of this, you don't really have chance to 'have your say', about the work, even though it will usually affect you to some degree.

We will probably need your cooperation while the work is in progress as well.

A case study

A recent project caused a great deal of upset and disturbance to those whose homes were being repaired. We had appointed a contractor to do the work in the knowledge that:

- We have carried out this work (many times) in the past, without incident or cause for concern
- The works were 'outside' so mess, dust, etc inside the home would not be an issue

We assumed:

- That anyone can 'put up' with a bit of noise and disturbance, for a while

- That as this was a long standing issue the residents would be delighted to accommodate us, for the sake of having the work done

There was little (if any) consultation prior to the works starting. As a result, most people were shocked by the disturbance and received a very 'rude awakening' when the works started. To compound this, things did not go to plan, unforeseen damage was caused and remedial works were not carried out as quickly as they could have been, largely because communication was not as good as it should have been.

The affect on some households was worse than others, and some households were better able to cope with the stress and upheaval than others.

Although it was impossible to avoid any disturbance, the inconvenience and upset could have been limited.

In retrospect, there were things we could have done, to help those worst affected cope better. It would have helped if we had been armed with a deeper appreciation of the client group we were working with, before the work began.

Need for change

We want to learn from this experience; and be proactive in heading off similar problems that might arise as a result of any planned improvement work. If unforeseen problems do arise, then we want to have plans in place to deal with them.

It has been clearly flagged up, by this event, that we are all different; we have different expectations, circumstances and needs. For any number of reasons, what can be tolerated easily and might be considered fairly trivial by some can be a disaster to others.

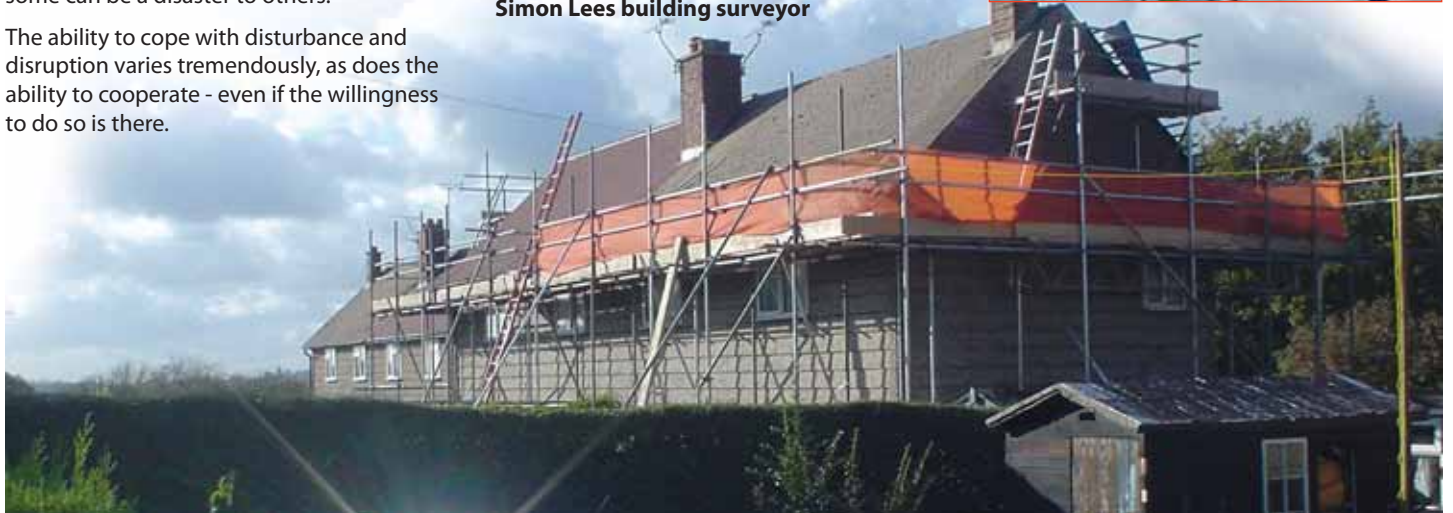
The ability to cope with disturbance and disruption varies tremendously, as does the ability to cooperate - even if the willingness to do so is there.

Future schemes

As happens now, you will receive a leaflet detailing the work; every time you are notified of work due. Please take the time to read through the leaflet because it explains what is to be done and should give you an idea of the likely disturbance.

We are devising a form for you to complete to tell us about your concerns and any particular problems you foresee. We will then work with you to ensure that anything possible and practical is done to adapt things to suit you.

Simon Lees building surveyor



News from Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum



Message from the chair

Over the last year the two main items on the agenda for the forum have been local offers and the reform of the housing revenue account.

What are local offers?

The government requires councils to work with communities to agree the priorities that are important to them. Members of the forum have been helping with the consultation at public events in different areas.

Housing revenue account reform

At the moment the council pays £8million a year subsidy to the government because Ashford has 100% decent homes. This money is redistributed to councils that have not reached the decent homes standard, which is unfair as we are being penalised because our housing stock is in good condition and is well managed. Next year, this is due to change which will mean that we will not be paying that money to the government and we will be able to control resources. The forum thinks that this is a good idea.

(right) photographs of local offer consultation



Antisocial behaviour training

Forum members Leigha Wilding and Ian Rhodes joined area managers on a one day training course looking at the legal remedies available for tackling anti social behaviour. The course covered a lot of ground and concentrated on the respective



benefits of injunctions and possession action.

Leigha said: "The course was good because it got you thinking about different scenarios, how they can escalate, and how important it is to get



the full picture and not be judgemental.

It definitely opened my eyes to the complexities there can be with this sort of situation."

Ian felt that more of this sort of joint training would be really useful.

Digital TV update

Campbell and Kennedy Ltd have been employed to carry out all the communal TV system installation and upgrades ready for the digital handover. Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum members were involved with ensuring the chosen contractors are able to demonstrate a strong consideration for residents needs, a flexible approach and good communication arrangements.

The council looks forward to making a start in October and completing before the end of February 2012, well before the digital switchover starts in our Meridian region on the 30th May 2012.

For residents not eligible for assistance through the BBC Help Scheme, the council has agreed some very good rates for Freesat and Freeview boxes which can be installed and set up for you at the time of the upgrade.

Residents interested in this option should contact the contractor direct.

The survey

A little while back, the council carried out a survey and wrote to all residents in blocks of flats and those connected to a council-owned communal TV system. The council wanted to establish how well prepared residents were for the digital switchover.

- **31% of respondents said they had their own satellite dish.**
- **79% of respondents said they understood what the Digital Switch over was all about.**
- **62% respondents said their TV's were digital ready, 18% said they were not and 20% did not know.**
- **43% of respondents requested further help.**

The survey identified a number of common concerns which are shown below together with the council's response.

20% of residents stated they did not know if their TVs were digital ready.

The council's response

If your TV shows more than five TV channels then it is probably digital ready.

If you are still unsure look for the digital tick logo on the front fascia. This is a certification mark for products which are designed to continue after the digital switchover.

The council will endeavour to contact all those that requested further help over the next couple of months.



Getting ready for winter

It's that time of year when we all start thinking about turning on the heating system. It is also the time of year when Swale Heating start to see the number of their service calls rocket up as sticky radiator valves and other niggles start to show themselves. To get ahead of the rush and avoid any potential cold nights, please try running up your heating system and make sure all radiators are warming up nicely all over. If you experience any problems please call Swale Heating on 0800 7311 886.

Make sure that all exposed pipe work is adequately lagged and protected from freezing. Turn off, isolate (and drain down if possible) external pipe work and taps when the temperature is going to drop below zero. Should the worse happen and you do spring a leak, make sure you know where your mains water stop cock is and check to see that it works!



The leaseholders' forum met in September and considered a wide range of issues including an update on the provision of solar panels, and the digital TV switchover. Ten leaseholders attended and minutes of the meeting were distributed to all leaseholders.

Sue Major, the officer responsible for all matters to do with leaseholders, their leased flats, or the block in which the flat is situated, is always happy to try to resolve problems, and can pass issues to the relevant officer if appropriate. Sue can be reached on 01233 330531 or sue.major@ashford.gov.uk.

Leaseholders are reminded that they are responsible for having regular boiler and gas checks carried out, and are also responsible for having an up to date energy performance certificate.

If you are a leaseholder and your contact details change it is really helpful if you can let Sue know. This ensures we keep you up dated with any matters regarding the lease.

Finally, it is a requirement in your lease that you notify us if you are sub-letting as it will affect the cover on your building insurance, for instance you won't be covered for accidental damage, and any claim may well be invalid.

Leaseholders' corner



Affordable furniture and electrical goods available

Gateway Furniture and Baby Equipment has been successfully providing good quality pre-loved furniture and baby equipment at an affordable price to those who need it most, within the local community.

For further details or to make a donation please call us on:

(01233) 638878

The Old Corn Store
Dover Place
Ashford
TN23 1HU

Web: www.gatewayfurniture.org
E-mail: office@gatewayfurniture.org

Due to the continued growing demand for the charity's service, we have the following good quality furniture available:

- Sofas, suites and armchairs
- Beds and bedroom furniture
- Dining table and chairs
- Washing machines and driers
- Fridges/ freezers/ cookers

(All upholstered items carry a current fire label)

Opening hours

Tuesday - Friday: 9am - 4pm
Saturday: 9am - 12.30pm
Sunday/Monday: Closed



Drains and sewers

From October 2011, Southern Water has been responsible for the maintenance of previously privately owned drains and sewers.

This includes the majority of foul and surface water drainage services to Ashford Borough Council owned properties apart from freshwater gullies, Ashford Borough Council sheltered schemes, and those properties served by dedicated sewerage treatment works.

Therefore, blockages or drainage issues believed to be outside the boundaries of an Ashford Borough Council owned property, or affecting a number of neighbouring properties through shared sewers, should be reported directly to Southern Water on 0845 2780845.

To prevent blockages you should make sure you never flush or dispose of inappropriate matter into the drainage and sewerage system.

For example...

Most of us use fat and oil in the preparation of food, but residual cooking oil, margarine, butter or lard often ends up being washed down the kitchen sink, clogging up sewers

and leading to blockages.

Fat, oil and grease stick to the inside of drains and sewers. Over time, this hardens to form a concrete-like material that can block the entire pipe and cause flooding as sewage is forced to escape through manholes and into streets and rivers or, even worse, into homes.

DO

Wipe and scrape utensils and plates before washing and dispose of any waste with your household rubbish.

Consider using a fat trap to collect excess fat and oil.

Use strainers in the sink to collect food particles.

DON'T

Don't use hot water to rinse grease off pots and pans or surfaces.

Never pour grease down sinks or into toilets. Pour excess grease into a container to harden and then dispose of it with your household rubbish.

General advice to prevent blockages and other help can be found at www.southernwater.co.uk/privatesewers or www.ashford.gov.uk

Housing surgery update

Earlier in the year we asked 'Are housing surgeries working for you?'

From your responses we made some changes including the trial of a new surgery at the Waterside Children's Centre which has proved quite a successful location.



However, we have had further feedback from you regarding how we can make more improvements with the most popular suggestion being that housing options advice is available at the surgeries. So from January 2012 housing options officer's will attend the surgeries for the first hour with the area manager, and will be able to offer advice on your housing needs from making an application for a transfer to discussing your queries.

For details of times, dates, and venues for the housing surgeries and for details of when the housing options team will be attending, please see the enclosed 2012 calendar.

Housing options advice at Ashford Gateway

Monday	9.30am	3.45pm
Tuesday	9.30am	3.45pm
Wednesday	9.30am	12.45pm
Thursday	9.30am	3.45pm
Friday	9.30am	3.45pm
Saturday	9.00am	12.45pm



Sure Start opens its doors in Wye

Cherry Blossom Children's Centre, the eighth children's centre in the Ashford area covers the villages to the north and east of the town, including Chilham, Wye, Aldington and Ruckinge.

The official opening celebration at Lady Joanna Thornhill Primary School, Bridge Street, Wye in November was a huge success with art and craft activities for families to enjoy together, plus an opportunity to meet the team who will be providing outreach services across the Cherry Blossom area.

Ashford Rural Children's Centres cover 212 square miles and 35 villages. So that we can get out to as many of our families as possible,

we are developing a new approach to outreach work. We hope to work across several villages for a number of sessions. Chilham was selected to be a pilot for this rolling programme. Families have been enthusiastically joining in activities to develop eye-hand coordination, balance, crawling, jumping skills and enjoying action songs and rhymes.

If you would like to receive regular information on children's centre services across the Cherry Blossom area please contact Karen Coppen, Community Involvement Worker on 01233 622296 or email Karen.coppen@kent.gov.uk



Matt and Lisa don their trainers

Sheltered scheme managers Matt Stacey and Lisa Mason, and Lisa's daughter Tayler took part in the Ashford 10k run in October and raised over £500 for Macmillan.

"We started training back in May of this year and none of us had ever run a race of this kind or even run for that matter! We ensured we trained weekly whatever the weather and we were all determined to get the best time we could. Lisa and Matt completed the course in 68 minutes and Tayler finished in 78

minutes so we were all very proud of ourselves considering this was our first.

"We decided to run for Macmillan Cancer Support and the support we got was tremendous from all our colleagues, residents at the sheltered units in the borough and our family and friends. We are still collecting the sponsorship money but we believe we have raised in excess of £500 which we are very proud of."

Matt Stacey



Welcome Claire!

Claire Wood has joined the housing estate management team. Claire has been familiarising herself with her patch and I caught up with her to see how she is settling in.

How have you found your first few weeks?

"Intense and busy but really good meeting people."

You have come from a housing association – what differences have you found?

"Not so much with the different landlords, but I was formerly managing just a small development and now I have 100s!"

Tell us about a couple of aspects of the job you enjoy.

"I like meeting people and getting out and about on the estates."

Is there anything you really don't enjoy?

"Not so far, but I am not looking forward to evicting people."

And finally what are you looking forward to?

"I want to get some resident involvement going – I've noticed people are not using the communal gardens and I want to encourage residents to make them spaces people want to use and enjoy rather than no-go areas used for dumping."



Wordsearch winner Mrs Marian Pullinger from Wye received a £20 shopping voucher from area manager Ollie Samways.



New youth facility

HOUSE is one of Ashford's most important partnership projects, bringing together the borough and county council and local youth and community organisations to create a brand new youth venue in the heart of the town.

HOUSE has been designed by young people, for young people, to give them a safe, comfortable space to 'hang out', socialise and access helpful services. It is based in the former reception area of the Stour Leisure Centre (supported by Ashford Leisure Trust), and will include indoor and outside socialising space, a refreshment area, internet access, TV and games, and on-site youth workers to support the users. The venue will initially be open for four 3-hour sessions a week.

Be smart go green – get the Recycle for Ashford app now

Residents who want information about recycling and waste disposal at their fingertips can now download a free smartphone app.

The app, launched by Ashford Borough Council, allows residents to find out blue box collection dates, search for their nearest recycling and waste disposal centres, find out what items can be recycled where and set collection reminders.

The Recycling for Ashford App is available for iPhone and Android devices, and the information can also be found on the www.ashford.gov.uk website.

Ashford Borough Council is one of the first local authorities in the country to launch a

smartphone recycling app.

CLlr Jessamy Blanford, portfolio holder for Environment, said: "Ashford Borough Council wants to make finding out information about recycling as easy as possible for our residents and with many people now owning smartphones we are pleased to offer them this new service.

"Improving the borough's recycling and waste services is one of the key priorities in our 5 year business plan and we hope by making it easier to find out information residents will be able to recycle more."



Christmas WORDSEARCH ~ Win £20!



Find these 10 words: DECORATIONS • ROBIN GOOSE • SLEDGE • HOLLY • SNOW • MISTLETOE TREE • PRESENTS • TURKEY

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 1 February 2012 will be entered into our prize draw for £20 in shopping vouchers.

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 1 February 2012**



Ashford Back Chat!



Calling all tenants and leaseholders...

We want to make it easier for more people to tell Ashford Borough Council customers' homes and properties 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 customers' homes and properties.

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 customers' homes and properties 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 customers' homes and properties 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 and 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.

