

Spring 2024 Issue 4

# HOUSING MATTERS

### Your homes, your news, your views

### Hello

Welcome to the Spring edition of Housing Matters, a newsletter for tenants and leaseholders of Ashford Borough Council, helping to keep you informed about your Housing Service.



If you would prefer a larger text version of this newsletter, please contact Tenant Engagement via email: **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk** or call **01233 330573** to request a copy to be sent.

## News at your finger tips

For up-to-date housing news any time please visit our webpage:

#### www.ashford.gov.uk/ housing-news

We regularly add articles to keep you informed about all things housing, from consultations you can take part in that help shape the service, to upcoming projects in your area. You can also sign up there for a version of this newsletter to be sent to your inbox every quarter, helping to save the environment, and save hassle by clicking directly through on featured weblinks.

### **Competition time!**

What was our overall satisfaction score from the 2023-2024 annual tenant satisfaction survey? The answer can be found in this newsletter. Answers can be emailed along with your name, address and telephone number to **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk**. They can also be posted to Tenant Engagement at Ashford Borough Council, TN23 1PL. One lucky tenant or leaseholder, drawn at random from the correct entries, will win a £25 Love2shop voucher. **Closing date for entries is 30th June 2024**.

Congratulations to our previous winner, Miss Thomas, who won our voucher in the Winter edition.

Full competition terms and conditions: www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-matters-comp

### Communal area clear all

In our last newsletter we mentioned about working with tenants to help clear items from communal areas in blocks of flats due to fire regulations. From mid February, contractors and officers visited flats and placed notices onto any items that were in breach of fire safety rules.

We would like to thank all tenants for their cooperation during the initial clearance week and with helping us to keep these areas clear going forward. It is important to keep communal areas free of items not only for fire risk reasons, but also to create a cleaner environment for everyone.

We received a lot of comments both positive and negative about the clearance and letter that was sent out to tenants sharing communal areas. We welcome all feedback to help us to improve.

Before

After



The clearance confirms research carried out by Tenant Engagement that the provision of storage space is fundamental for those living in flatted accommodation. This information is already being fed into plans for any new developments.

### Spring cleaning

If you are thinking of tackling a spring clean and accumulate any excess waste or rubbish, please make sure it is disposed of in the right way. You can contact a licensed waste carrier to collect items but you must make sure that they have a valid waste carrier's licence. Without one, waste could be disposed of illegally and you could be liable for a fine for using them. Please visit https://tinyurl.com/28s7vf9t to check waste carrier licences.

You can also book a bulky waste collection by the council. The fees for collection are currently £39 for up to four items. Or for white goods, such as washing machines, fridges, freezers, etc. (but not large American style) the fee is £26 for each item. For a list of what can and can't be collected, and to book a collection please go to our website www.ashford. gov.uk/large-item-collection

Alternatively, you can take certain items yourself to the Ashford Household Waste Recycling Centre, located at Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate, Brunswick Road, Ashford, TN23 1EL. You can check which items can be taken there and book a slot using https://tinyurl.com/yztu39ve



### **Regulator referral**

You will have recently received a letter from Tracey Kerly, the Chief Executive of the council, about our Housing service referring itself to the Regulator. We want to be open and transparent with you about how we need to do better at providing better quality homes and an improved level of service. We would like to reassure you that we are putting plans in place to address any issues.



### **Electrical installation condition checks**

As part of our safety commitments, our team check the condition of electrical installations in all our properties every five years. It is important that tenants allow access for these checks to be carried out, as faulty and old wiring is one of the main causes of electrical fires



within the home. Our team at ABC Electrical Services, will check the condition of cables, switches, sockets, and other accessories helping to reduce these potential risks. Any works that are required can then be actioned swiftly. The checks can take from 1-4 hours, depending on the size of the property.

Further information on electrical, and other safety in the home, can be found at our webpage www.ashford.gov.uk/living-safely-in-your-home

### Water saving devices update

We mentioned in our last newsletter about water saving devices that we would like to install, that are FREE for tenants and leaseholders. These devices help to save water by regulating the water flow and stabilising water pressure, resulting in water being heated more efficiently. This can benefit you in reduced water and energy bills.

We have partnered with a company called Cenergist who will manage the project and they will contact you directly to book an appointment via telephone or in person when they are visiting your area. They will be as flexible as possible with appointment times and will be in your home for just a short period of time to install the device to the pipework. While there, they will also check your property for any internal shower, toilet or tap leaks, and if they are able to repair them, they will do so at no extra cost.

The project is due to commence on 15 April. More information and updates on the project can be found at www.ashford.gov.uk/water-saving-devices



### **Blooming lovely**

Our independent living schemes will see their garden competition blossom again this year. Previous years have seen some healthy competition, and we are looking forward to seeing how the gardens will look this year.

Gardening can provide a creative outlet that helps mental and physical wellbeing, with all residents in the schemes benefitting from living in a lovely environment. We will share with you the winners and stand out designs in the next issue.



We will be looking to rollout the garden competition to all tenants in 2025 so get those green fingers prepped and ready for this time next year where there will be prizes to be had!

If you don't have a green space or live in a flat there will still be a chance for you to get involved, from window boxes to hanging baskets and indoor displays.

You could reduce your bills <u>without</u> changing your daily routine

### **Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results**

Thank you to all 1,021 that took part in our annual tenant satisfaction survey. The survey for 2023-2024 was the first survey in accordance with questions set by the Regulator of Social Housing called Tenant Satisfaction Measures, or TSMs.

An overall satisfaction score of 63.2% was given by tenants for the service provided by Ashford Borough Council.

Below shows a summary of how satisfied tenants feel with the services that we provide across the TSMs.



**64.7%** are satisfied with repairs



**59%** are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair



**65.8%** satisfied that their homes are well maintained



**67%** feel treated fairly and with respect



**27%** satisfied with our approach to handling complaints



**61.6%** satisfied their communal areas are kept clean



72% satisfied with how safe their home is



**59.7%** satisfied with how informed they are with things that matter to them



**48.6%** satisfied that we listened and acted upon their views



**44.6%** satisfied with how we deal with antisocial behaviour



**52.4%** are satisfied that we make a positive contribution to their neighbourhood



63.2%

satisfied with the service provided by Ashford Borough Council

### So.... what happens next?

Every single comment and response has been analysed and we have pulled together an action plan across our housing service to make improvements on key areas flagged in the responses.

The results of your feedback sets a base for us to look to, build upon and improve year on year. These results, along with data such as how many fire safety checks and repairs we have completed, will be submitted to the Regulator so that they, and you, can hold us to account.

A more detailed set of results can be found on our survey webpage www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-satisfaction-survey.

If you would like to discuss the results of the survey in more detail, please get in touch with Jo in Tenant Engagement on **01233 330573** or email **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk** 



### Safeguarding children, young people and adults

In Housing, and also throughout the council, we have a duty to raise concerns about residents we feel might be at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation - this is called safeguarding. Any resident can also report safeguarding concerns too.

If you are worried that someone is suffering abuse or you are yourself, please contact the following: For child welfare, call 03000 411111, or email social.services@kent.gov.uk

For adult welfare, call **03000 416161**, or email **social.services@kent.gov.uk**. For out of hours and in an emergency you can call **03000 419191** 

Anonymous concerns can also be made to CrimeStoppers on **0800 555 111** or via their website **www.crimestoppers-uk.org**. If an adult or a child is in immediate danger, always call 999 for the emergency services.

More information (including details of the different types of abuse) and resources can be found on the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (**www.kmsab.org.uk**) or the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-agency Partnership (**www.kscmp.org.uk**) websites.



Amongst other areas highlighted by the survey, we will:

- Monitor complaints in more detail and gain learning from complainant feedback
- Roll out complaints handling training for housing staff Raise more awareness about the complaints process
- Improve communication with those that have contacted us about anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Provide clearer guidance and expectations about ASB handling
- Improve Repairs team customer service levels and improve handler availability
- Provide more visibility of dates for when upgrades to bathrooms, kitchens, windows are due
- Improve our communication with you across housing services

### 2024-2025 survey

We will be looking to carry out the next survey for 2024-2025 this September, so keep an eye out for it. The more you can tell us about our service the better - the good, the bad, and even the ugly. The best way for us to understand how we are doing is to hear from our tenants directly.

### Do you know who your housing officer is?

A lot of tenants have told us that they don't know who looks after the rents or estate management in their area, especially when officers change within our Housing team.

To help make things easier we now have dedicated email addresses and telephone numbers for the area that you live in. This means that there is one single point of contact for you, throughout your tenancy.

The contact details for each area have been provided to tenants in a letter and is available to view on our website **www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer** 

Contact details for housing officers you are currently talking to, will still work, it just means that if the officer ever changes you won't need to chase down who has replaced them.

Please note that if you live in one of our Dahlia schemes, your Independent Living Officer (ILO) is always your point of contact.

### Estate management

For all things related to your tenancy agreement, reporting anti-social behaviour and other estaterelated matters here are the contact details:

Estates email	Estates telephone	Areas covered	Current estates officer
estates1@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330373	Charing, Charing Heath, Charing Hill, Egerton, Godmersham, Great Chart (Bean Cl, Coronation Drive, Hillcrest), Hothfield, Little Chart, Kennington, Pluckley, Shepway, Smarden, Westwell	Kerena Hopkin
estates2@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330426	Aldington, Bilsington, Ham Street, Mersham, Musgrove area, Ruckinge, Sevington, Smeeth, Watercress area, Woolreeds area (not Beaver Lane)	Toto Ngoga
estates3@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330244	Appledore, Bethersden, Biddenden, Brabourne, Eastmead area, Great Chart (not in estates1), Hampden area, High Halden, Kenardington, Newenden, Rolvenden, Singleton, St Michaels, Stone, Tenterden, Wittersham, Woodchurch, Woolreeds area (Beaver Lane)	Pearl Maxwell
estates4@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330501	Boughton Aluph, Brook, Brookfield area, Challock, Chilham, Eastwell, Hastingleigh, Molash, Old Wives Lees, Shottenden, South Willesborough, Willesborough, Wye	Luke Bingham
estates5@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330595	Henwood, Kingsnorth, Newtown, Repton Manor, Shadoxhurst, Town Centre	Robert Perfitt



### Rents

For all things related to payment of your rent and to discuss any rental arrears, here are the contact details:

Rents email	Rents telephone	Areas covered	Rents Current Officer
rents1@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330830	Bethersden, Biddenden, Brabourne, Eastmead area, Great Chart, Hampden area, High Halden, Hothfield, Little Chart, Musgrove area, Smarden, Woolreeds are (not Beaver Lane)	Georgia Anderson
rents2@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330609	Chilmington, Henwood, Kennington, Newenden, Rolvenden, South Willesborough, St Michaels, Stone, Tenterden, Wittersham	Mandy Bushell
rents3@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330379	Boughton Aluph, Brook, Challock, Charing, Charing Heath, Charing Hill, Chilham, Eastwell, Great Chart, Hastingleigh, Molash, Newtown, Old Wives Lees, Pluckley, Shepway, Shottenden, Singleton, Westwell, Willesborough, Wye	Skye Hay
rents4@ashford.gov.uk	01233 330408	Aldington, Appledore, Bilsington, Brabourne, Brookfield area, Ham Street, Kenardington, Kingsnorth, Mersham, Ruckinge, Sevington, Shadoxhurst, Smeeth, Town Centre (Ashford), Warehorne, Watercress area, Woodchurch, Woolreeds area (Beaver Lane)	Emma Sykes

### Estate walkabouts

Every fortnight a group of our housing officers and key staff from teams such as repairs, go out across the borough to look at estates and chat to residents. They will report repairs, fly-tipping and rubbish that we are not



aware of, any grounds maintenance issues, and ensure fire safety compliance amongst many other things. If you would like to meet the team on any of these dates for your area please get in touch with Tenant Engagement on **01233 330573** or email **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk**.

If you are unable to come along, we would always love to hear your views about the area that you live in. We are looking for Estate Mates to be champions of their area and to receive feedback both positive and negative, so please get in touch if that sounds like something you would be interested in.

### Next walkabouts

7 May - Tenterden, St Michaels

20 May - Rural North East – Boughton Aluph, Brook, Challock. Chilham, Crundale, Eastwell, Godmersham, Hastingleigh, Molash, Shott, Westwell

**3 June** - Rural South East - Aldington, Bethersden, Biddenden, Bilsington, Brabourne, Chart, Hamstreet, High Halden, Mersham, Newenden, Rolvenden, Ruckinge, Singleton, Smarden, Smeeth, Wittersham

17 June – Rural South West

# Housing Ombudsman resident panel

The Housing Ombudsman is inviting tenants across England to apply to join their **Resident Panel and contribute** to the work that they do in improving residents' lives through landlords' services. As a panel member, you will be able to share experiences and suggest improvements through virtual discussions and regular meetings with the Ombudsman. This is a great opportunity for you to be part of their vision to embed a positive complaint handling culture across the Housing sector and make sure residents' views are heard.

For more information and to apply please visit their website www.housing-ombudsman. org.uk.

### Applications will close on 30 April 2024.

The Housing Ombudsman's website also has a wealth of information and advice for tenants about all things housing, such as how complaints are handled and topics such as damp and mould.



### Noakes Meadow play area

Noakes Meadow, near Brookfield Road, has funding from Section 106 (Local Development) and Housing to improve the open space. The money can only be spent on improving the area there and replacing/ renovating the play area.

We asked you what kinds of play equipment and changes you would like to see. Thank you to all those who participated in our consultation which closed on the 9 February. It was great to see the community so excited about something positive being done to the area and we are currently getting a contractor on board to carry out the works.



Residents wanted the play area to have equipment for mixed ages rather than having separate areas for younger and older children. The most popular choice of play equipment was the multi-climb unit. There were concerns expressed about the paths there being difficult to access in wet conditions, so a new access path is planned as well as raising the level of the main path to tackle this. The MUGA (multiuse game area) which is regularly used, will be refurbished.

We can't wait to see the new space be unveiled later this year and for residents to make use of the improved area.

### **Tenant collaboration**

If joining the Housing Ombudsman resident panel isn't your thing, we are always looking for tenants to take part in panels and research work with us here in Housing. Our Tenant Engagement team are always working with groups of tenants to help improve our services.

A recent online focus group asked tenants their views on our current lettings policy. We asked for their thoughts on potential changes to how we allocate housing to those on the waiting list, and how to prioritise the needs of those requiring homes.

We also ran other online focus groups asking tenants their thoughts about us as part of an audit.

If you would like to take part in groups like this, or would like to get in touch to chat about other ways to get involved, please get in touch with Tenant Engagement on **01233 330573** or **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk** 

### Litter picking

Does seeing litter in your local area really get you down? We want to galvanise our amazing tenants and leaseholders to take part in litter picks and help make estates greener. We can help organise and provide kit required for litter picks, as well as guidance and assistance. Please get in touch with Tenant Engagement on **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk** or **01233 330573**, if you might be interested in this. We will be putting on litter picking days and will be promoting those if you'd like to come along.



### New consumer standards

New standards for housing and housing services came into affect on 1 April. These standards have been set by the Regulator of Social Housing and are there to ensure that landlords provide an expected level of service to their tenants. There are four main standards, covering a variety of important areas:

- Safety and Quality Standard stock quality, decent homes, health and safety, repairs, adaptations
- Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard fairness and respect, considering diverse needs, engagement with tenants, information and communications about landlord services, performance information, complaints handling, selfreferral
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard safety of shared spaces, local cooperation, anti-social behaviour and hate incidents, domestic abuse
- Tenancy Standard allocations and lettings, tenancy sustainment and evictions, tenure, support and supply of mutual exchange

We will be holding ourselves to these standards and will be audited by the Regulator to check how we are performing against them. For more information about the new standards please go to www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards

### Henwood short-stay apartments update

Our project to bring short-stay apartments to a site at Henwood is now coming together on site with units being craned into place.

The modular pods made by Zed Pods, are a mix of one, two and three bed dwellings, designed to create zero operational carbon homes with very low energy consumption and running costs.

The units will be a stepping stone until individuals or households who have become homeless are able to move to more permanent accommodation. The Henwood scheme allows for homeless people to enjoy better living conditions whilst ensuring we are also mindful of the environment.



Deputy Chief Executive Ben Lockwood, Zed Pods Operations Director Rehan Khodabuccus and Councillor Bill Barrett, the cabinet member for Housing and Homelessness

### Help and advice

In each issue we like to dedicate space to local good causes and to things that can help our tenants in their lives, whether that be financial support or support for their wellbeing. As it's springtime, we wanted to tell you about two amazing social enterprises in the borough that seek to enhance not only the community but also the environment.

### Shedkwick CIC

Shedkwick is a non-profit group that works to help improve mental health and reduce social isolation. They work in the community tackling overgrown gardens and meet at their base in Ashford, to chat and work on a variety of woodwork- based projects such as bug hotels, benches and planters.

Mick Bishop set up Shedkwick CIC when he realised that a lot of people were facing challenges with their mental health during the pandemic. "With the aim of helping people through tough times, Shedkwick CIC provides a safe, all- inclusive space for people to come together and have a go at gardening and woodwork projects – some people move on to helping people in the local community, taming overgrown gardens and repairing collapsed fences and dilapidated sheds. Shedkwick CIC also offer a pop-up shed event for other organisations in the local community – we'd be happy to come along and engage with you."

If you would like to get involved with the group please get in touch with them via email on **shedkwickcic@gmail.com**, visit **www.facebook.com/shedkwickcic** or call **07501 376512**.

Their site, next to the Mosque on Torrington Road, is open Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays 10am-2.30pm and everyone over 18 is welcome.



### Uprising

Uprising is a non-profit local charity that helps to support young people, families and communities to improve their lives and that of their surroundings. The team run a variety of projects across the borough such as:

The Metanoia Project - educating young people and others about knife crime

**Aspire +** - working closely with schools to provide an alternative education course for young people aged 14-16 who struggle in a mainstream school setting. Aiming to provide basic qualifications and supporting them to go onto further education, employment or training.

**Community Action Teams** - a gardening service that works closely with Ashford Borough Council to maintain communal spaces and shared gardens. It provides work experience for young students.

Hang 10 - providing sports activities, games and staff to provide support and advice to young people where they tend to meet, such as local parks or housing estates.

If you would like to take part in the groups please get in touch with them via email on info@uprisinguk.org.uk, call 07823 384951 or visit their website www.uprisinguk.org.uk

# **S**Uprising

### Calling all leaseholders

This is just a quick reminder that any estate management concerns should be passed to your relevant Housing Officer and any repairs jobs be reported to our repairs team directly. It is important to contact these teams directly rather than going via the Leasehold Team. This means you can get through to the right people quickly.

For repairs (non-heating or hot water) call **01233 330366** or report online **www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair** 

For any hot water, heating, or plumbing issues, please contact a plumber of your choice to assist.

For any estate management issues such as anti-social behaviour, issues with communal areas, etc. contact your Neighbourhood Housing Officer (see pages 6-7), or

call the duty officer on 01233 330688,

or email housing@ashford.gov.uk

For planned maintenance advice email **planned.maintenance@ashford.gov.uk** 

For Leasehold Building Insurance Claims

call 0161 274 9077

or email **claims@protectorinsurance.co.uk** quoting policy number **1809788**.

### **Property surveys**

A company called Ridge will be working with us very soon to assess the condition of our properties. As part of this project they will require access to your home for a short while to carry out a property survey. The assessment will help to prioritise maintenance and improvement projects across homes, helping us to maintain and improve living standards, ensure safety, and promote better well-being for residents. Ridge will be in touch via letter when they are due to visit your area. More information and updates can be found at

www.ashford.gov.uk/ housing-homes-survey

# RIDGE

### Eat Well Spend Less Roadshows

The Tenant Engagement team as well as other housing officers regularly take part in Eat Well, Spend Less Roadshows that are held across the borough. It is a chance for us to meet tenants and residents and help signpost them to our services. The event has a variety of other participants involved in healthcare, wellbeing and community support, as well as a foodbank and hygiene products. It is a one-stop shop for an amazing array of advice and support for all residents, not just tenants and leaseholders

The next confirmed event is:

12 June 2024 – 10am-2pm – St Mildred's Church, Church Road, Tenterden, TN30 6AT

Other events and opportunities to meet us, can be found on our webpage www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement.

Come and say hi!



### Plans in your area

Want to know about planning applications in your area? Sign up to the planning subscription service and you'll get tailored emails straight to your inbox letting you know what's happening in your neighbourhood.

Choose to get notifications in your parish or ward about valid planning applications, applications under consultation, those going to committee, and final decisions that have been made.

You'll receive a weekly email with information according to your selection together with a link to the application on the public register for you to look at the application/plans in more detail (you can unsubscribe at any time).

To find out more and to sign-up visit www.ashford.gov.uk/get-involved-in-planning



### SHDF update

The energy saving measures for those properties involved in the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) programme are being installed and you might have seen some solar panels pop up on some properties. Those homes in the first phase should have received their welcome packs and been told about what measures they will be getting. If you would like more information about the project please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/social-housing-decarbonisation-fund

### Household Support Fund

In the recent Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Government would be providing an additional £500million to enable the extension of the Household Support Fund, from April to September 2024. The Household Support Fund provides targeted support to vulnerable households with the cost of essentials, including food and utilities. We are likely to receive a proportion of funding to run a local scheme in the borough, as we have done previously.

We have a dedicated website page where updates on the scheme and eligibility can be found, including how to apply and any key dates.

#### **Please visit**

www.ashford.gov.uk/householdsupport-fund-information for more details and to apply.



### **Useful contacts**

Report repairs or damp/mould: www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair or call 01233 330366

Raise a complaint: www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints or call 01233 331111

Your Neighbourhood Housing Officer: www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer or call 01233 330688

Housing help and advice: www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-help

Welfare Intervention Team: www.ashford.gov.uk/welfare-reform or call 01233 331111

Tenant Engagement Team: www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement or call 01233 330573

