



WINTER 2021

TENANT NEWS

Welcome to our third edition of tenant news

OUR TELEPHONE NUMBERS ARE CHANGING

Residents who completed our survey over the summer told us contacting us by phone can be difficult. We've listened and to make life easier we are having two new housing phone numbers. They are:

Talk to us about your tenancy

01304 801084

Talk to us about ongoing repairs or permissions

01304 801110

This should make it easier for you to get straight through to the right team – **see inside for full details.**





Cllr Derek Murphy,
Portfolio Holder for
Social Housing and
Port Health

Welcome from Cllr Derek Murphy

“The housing service has been back in house now for a little over a year. In that time, we’ve been working hard to try to improve services for you, our tenants, and leaseholders, and have made great progress in many areas especially those relating to health and safety checks. Clearly many of you agree with that as over 71% of the people who took our survey over the summer said they felt confident that DDC provides homes that are safe and secure for them to live in.

“There have been challenges this year but despite this we have had some very positive feedback from those of you who took part in our survey over the summer. We will be making sure that we use your feedback to help us improve the way we work and a very big thank you to those of you who contributed to this.”

And the winner is...



A huge thank you to everyone who took the time and trouble to complete our tenant satisfaction survey. We are going to be looking at the results of this in detail and considering how we can change our services to continue to improve them.

Congratulations to our lucky winner Mrs. M of Kingsdown who told us: “Thank you for the voucher, I never win anything! I never normally do surveys, but I wanted to do this one to share my views to help improve services at Dover District Council.”

Can you spot Ernie the Elf?



Ernie is a cheeky little elf and has a game for all the family. He is hiding all over this newsletter, can you spot him?

He's got a quiz for you to solve, answer his questions when you find him. All answers should be found in the newsletter. To check you are right, the answers are at the back.

What you told us



69 % of you said you were satisfied with the overall quality of your homes



71% said they feel confident that DDC is keeping their homes safe and secure



72% like the neighbourhood they live in



76% of you feel that your rent offers good value for money

Your **top three priorities** for us to help sort out are:

- 1. Day to day repairs**
- 2. Being able to get through to our officers easily**
- 3. Grounds maintenance**

Our next steps are to look carefully at the things you’ve told us and use them to help us continue to improve our services. We will keep you up to date with the changes we plan to make through our website and newsletters.

You said we did!

One of the top issues mentioned by tenants completing the survey is that the phone system could be improved to make it easier and quicker for you to get through to the right team. We’ve listened to what you’ve said and from 1 December 2021 we are having 2 new phone numbers. One will be to contact housing staff on about tenancy matters and the second will take you through to our repairs service.

This means you will have fewer options to listen to and will get through to the right team first time.

Don't forget:

**For tenancy matters call
01304 801084**

Repairs are still reported to Mears as before on 0800 0234 320 or by email to dover.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk

For central heating repairs email Gas Call Services at DDCcustomerservices@gascall.co.uk or call 0800 012 9958

However, if you want to talk to Dover District Council about housing maintenance issues such as ongoing repairs, permissions, enquiries or advice, our new number is 01304 801110



What date will we be launching the new phone number?

Get involved

The survey results have highlighted that some tenants are unsure how we listen to you. We want to rectify this and provide more opportunities for you to share your views and help us build a better service.

We will be doing this by:

- **Listening to you!** We are setting up focus groups, dedicated to resolving issues and developing our services with tenants at the heart .
- We want to set up a database of tenants who are willing to support us by sharing their views up to 4 times per year.
- **You said, so we did!** We are committing to sharing how we are changing and improving in response to customer feedback.

Join one of our focus groups

Want to share your views but can't commit regularly?

Come along to one of our one-off focus groups where we will use your views to build and shape new services at Dover District Council's Housing department.

Our focus groups are informal sessions, run online at home or in person and run by DDC Housing staff. Want to find out more or sign up? Email us at:

tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk.

Who is our Tenant Involvement Officer?"



Come along to Dover District Tenants' Group's AGM!

The DDTG are holding its annual general meeting in January and would like lots of support from fellow tenants and stakeholders. The more people involved with the DDTG, the bigger and more varied its voice will be.

Why come along?

- See what the DDTG do and how YOU can be involved in shaping services.
- Come and meet the team and the tenants who are representing you.
- The group is friendly and welcoming.

Do you want to do something worthwhile? You don't have to be an expert or have a big voice. Come along and we hope you enjoy it. We are looking to do a mixture of face to face and online meetings so access to the internet is important.

**The AGM is on
11th January 2022
at 11am-1pm.**

Scan the QR code to find out more or email our Tenant Involvement Officer, Beth Becks at:

tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk



Poster Competition



**Win
£50**

The Dover District Tenants Group are running a poster competition. Are you passionate about littering, fire safety and keeping our communal areas clear?

There are 3 categories:

- 5 – 11 year olds
- 12 – 18 year olds
- 18+

There is a £50 prize for each category and the posters will be printed and displayed in communal area in blocks of flats.

Please note: Competition is open to all tenants, leaseholders and members of their families living with them. Full competition rules and how to enter are found on our website, search 'Poster competition'.



**KEEP ME
POSTED**

www.dover.gov.uk/keepmeposted

Sign Up for 'Housing For Tenants' on our Keep Me Posted for email updates on your landlord service. Visit DDC's website www.dover.gov.uk/Keep Me Posted, when selecting topics, select 'Housing For Tenants' under 'Your Council'

Estate Inspections

We've arranged our formal Estate Inspections dates for next year, running from March 2022 to the end of October.



Estates and blocks are regularly inspected for Health and Safety reasons but every year we do a community event on each estate where Tenant, Leaseholders, Contractors, Councilors, and other stakeholders are invited to join the Housing team on an Inspection where issues can be raised. It's a great opportunity to meet the team and take make a difference in your area.

To find out when we'll be in your area, please visit our website and search 'estate inspections'. You can also find out information about our Tenant Estate Rangers.



How much is the total we're giving out for all our poster competition prizes?

www.dover.gov.uk - 'Housing for Tenants'

Estate Assistants



Alex (left) and Mitchell (right) started work with the housing team on the 1 October 2020. They are both new to housing and are our Estate Assistants.

What do they do?

Alex and Mitchell cover half of the district each and a typical day involves doing block inspections in their areas and making sure contractors are doing what they are supposed to. To try to keep residents as safe as possible they carry out a range of health and safety checks from making sure communal areas are clean and safe to checking that bin areas are tidy, and refuse is collected on time.

A common problem they deal with is items left in communal areas that can be a fire risk. When this happens they have to ask tenants to move the items so that those that live in the block can be kept safe.



Why should you not put Christmas Decorations in Communal areas?



What do they like most about their jobs?

“Definitely the diversity. As an inspector, you’re involved in so many different areas whether it’s checking the safety of a block or dealing with any issues our tenants might have. You’re always learning something new, and this is helping us gain more experience. Being on foot for most of the week is a great way to interact with our tenants and building rapport and trust with our tenants is something extremely important. If you see us on your estate, come and say hello! We want to hear from you.”

What do they like least

“Probably the worst thing we’ve ever had to do is ask tenants to take down Christmas decorations! We definitely don’t want to be mean and we realise that tenants who put decorations up in the communal hall only want their block to look nice and don’t realise what a fire hazard they are creating. If you live in a flat, please help us by only decorating inside your property.”

See photo of an example of decorations that were causing a fire risk. These were promptly removed in collaboration with the residents in the block.

My Neighbourhood

Don’t be a rubbish neighbour

In our recent survey you said that keeping our estates clean and tidy was a high priority for you. We know that not everyone can be a keen gardener but we do expect tenants to keep their gardens tidy and free from rubbish that can attract vermin.

We always try to support our tenants but when we come across a case where the tenants just won’t work with us we will take legal action. We recently dealt with a case like this and obtained a possession order and evicted the tenant. In this case the tenant had allowed broken furniture, black sacks overflowing with food waste, used nappies and rubbish to pile up in both the front and back gardens and allowed hedges and weeds to become so overgrown that it caused huge problems for the surrounding neighbours.

The former tenant will be charged for the cost of the clearing of the gardens and all internal repairs that will be needed inside the property, which can be thousands of pounds.



Please turn it down

The Council recently obtained 2 injunctions in the County Court to stop 2 households causing a noise nuisance to their neighbours. An injunction can be to prevent or encourage people to behave in a certain way and usually stays in place for 6 months or 12 months.

On 29 October one of the tenants was found guilty of 8 breaches of injunction (contempt of court) and given a suspended prison sentence. Following this ruling, DDC can now apply for possession of the property and the tenant’s eviction so the property can be reallocated.

Become a Neighbourhood Ranger

Are you interested in keeping your communal areas clean and tidy, and helping your community? Become a Ranger and join the housing team on their Estate Inspections, give your perspective about what the estate normally looks like, and share your advice on improvements. Let us know how our contractors are performing.

For more information about Rangers and dates of Estate Inspections, please visit our website, all information is in our ‘Get Involved’ section.

Safe and secure homes

How are we doing with health and safety checks?

We have been working really hard at making sure the “big six” (Gas safety, Water Hygiene, Lift safety, Electrical safety, Asbestos safety, and Fire safety) checks have been done and continue to be completed at regular intervals.

Since DDC took over from East Kent Housing, we have made it a priority to make our housing stock “Compliant” and we hope all our hard work is helping you feel safe in your homes.

Clearly many of you feel that we are doing a pretty good job of that with 71% of those who completed our survey saying they were satisfied that the Council takes health and safety matters in your homes seriously.



What percentage of our blocks have had a water safety assessment?

How are we doing now?

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

93%

of blocks have up to date Electrical Installation Condition Report certificate (EICR).

When rewiring is complete on a small number of blocks this will soon bring our figures up to 100%.

86%

of our homes have an up to date EICR and we are arranging appointments for those that don't have.

This work slowed down during the pandemic when some tenants were worried about having workmen in their homes.

If you have not had your electrical safety check done yet we would love to hear from you. Please phone us on our new housing repairs number 01304 801110 to book an EICR appointment.



ASBESTOS

100%

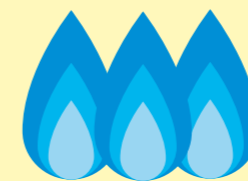
of surveys where we have a duty to complete have been done.

FIRE SAFETY

100%

of our blocks have an up to date Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)

In total during this past 12 months, we have completed over 1237 fire safety management and building items.

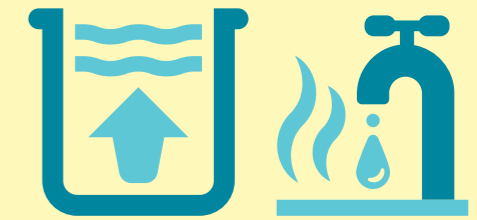


HEATING SAFETY

Only 1 of our properties has an out of date gas safety certificate and we are taking legal action to deal with that.

97%

of our tenants with other forms of heating (not gas) have been checked and appointments are in diary for those that haven't.

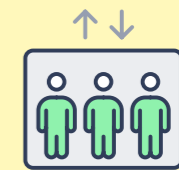


WATER SAFETY

100%

of our blocks containing stored hot water now have a water safety assessment in place.

These systems are being regularly serviced to ensure that the water is stored safely and in accordance with the water safety code of practice. Contractors are in place to do a small amount of improvement work picked up by these assessments.



LIFT SAFETY

100%

of our passenger lifts are fully serviced and checked by an independent body. All repairs identified have been done.

All this has been achieved under very challenging circumstances due to the impact the pandemic has had on contractors, DDC housing staff and of course you the tenants.

Housing

Increasing our stock



Dover District Council has an ambitious programme to build new Council Housing in the district. Since the start of the year, 40 new Council homes have been completed, and a further 50 are under construction. Find out more on our website.

One of the developments currently on site is at Napchester Road, Whitfield (See picture). When complete, this development will provide 26 new Council homes, including 1 bedroom accessible flats for wheel chair users.

If you're interested in homeownership and the new projects we're undertaking, please visit our website.



Investing in your homes

Now that we have the service back, we can start to plan how we are going to make improvements to your homes rather than just repair them. Over the course of the last 10 years some of the work that we would have expected to be done in a planned way has been missed and now we need to catch up.

To find out how much needs to be done each year we are checking the information we have and where necessary, will have surveyors visit properties to do a full survey. We will use this information to plan our work and publish details of that over the next five years.

One of the areas that we know has been neglected is external decorations and the Council is pleased to say that we have appointed a new contractor, Bell Decorating Group to do this work.

Support

Rising fuel costs

You may have seen in the national news that gas prices have risen and are due to keep rising. If you are struggling to pay your energy bills, you may worry that your energy supply will be cut off. This is always a last resort for the energy companies so it is vital to talk to them straight away and try to work out a solution. They may set up a payment plan or you may meet criteria for energy assistance, see below.

Remember, always check that you're on the best tariff. Shop around for the best deal for you.

Support from your Energy Supplier

Most Energy suppliers have charitable trusts and schemes to help manage your money, advice about increasing income and in some cases can provide grants if you meet certain criteria. Speak to your provider if you feel you might meet their criteria. Here are the names of some of these schemes:

- **E.ON Energy Fund**
- **EDFs Priority Services Register**
- **British Gas Energy Trust**

Warm Home Discount

You could get £140 off your electricity bill for winter 2021 to 2022 under the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October and March. Contact your supplier to apply.



How much money could you save with the Warm Home Discount Scheme?

Having money trouble?

Remember, if you fail to pay your rent you could be at risk of losing your home. There is lots of help and advice available to you if you feel like you can't keep up. The sooner you get help, the better.

Here are some places to start:

- Citizens Advice www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Stepchange: www.stepchange.org
- National Debtline: www.nationaldebtline.org or call 0808 808 4000
- Money Advice Service: moneyadviceservice.org.uk or call 0300 500 500

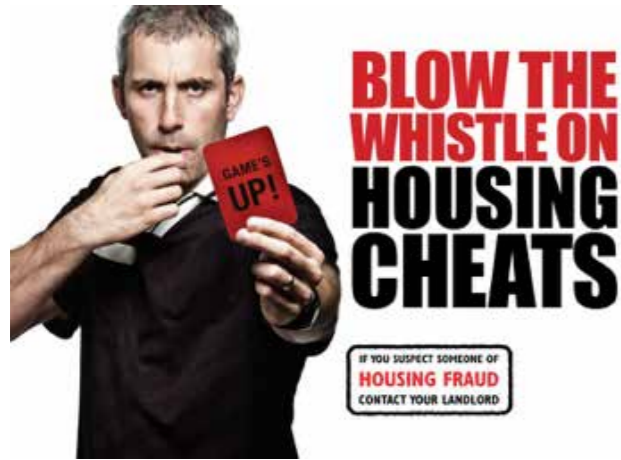
Universal Credit is changing

Universal Credit is changing so if you work, you may be entitled to more than you were previously. If you are not claiming Universal Credit currently due to earnings, you may now be entitled to, as the allowances for working people have been increased. Check your entitlement online by visiting www.entitledto.co.uk

Top Tip!

If you're cooking, turn your heating off and open a window slightly. This will reduce your energy consumption and help prevent condensation from building up.

Tenancy Fraud



What is tenancy fraud?

- Unlawful subletting – where a tenant rents out their entire home to someone else without the Council's permission
- Someone claims to have lived with the tenant before they died and take over a tenancy they are not entitled to
- Someone makes a right to buy application and uses false information
- Key selling – when a tenant sells their keys to someone for a lump sum
- Using false information to get a property through the housing register.

Tenancy fraud is not always easy to spot and often the person living in the property is unaware they are illegally residing in the property. Here are top tips to spot fraud:

- There are suddenly new people living next to you
- The property looks empty and seems to have been abandoned
- People are a bit vague about who lives in the property or what relationship links them to the tenant
- More ASB or nuisance behaviour from the property
- When sadly the tenant dies their friends or family continue living there
- Your neighbour talks about their landlord as a person rather than the Council.

If you are suspicious about a possible tenancy fraud you can report this to us using our online form, search our website for 'Tenancy Fraud' or scan the QR code. When we receive reports we carry out some basic background checks and if we think there could be a case to investigate, we will pass this information on if it is a benefit fraud or refer the case to our specialist tenancy fraud investigators.



Tenancy fraud is illegal and people doing it face possible criminal charges and fines up to £5000. Tenancy Fraud stops homes being available on the housing waiting list for people who are in desperate need for suitable accommodation.



How could someone commit Tenancy Fraud in their Right to Buy application?

Changes to our property team

Welcome to our new Principal Repairs Officer Ian Prescott.

Goodbye to Len King, our long-standing Maintenance Inspector who has retired after an impressive 50 years service!

Kent Against Burglary

Kent Police are running a new campaign called Kent Against Burglary. Kent Police want to highlight that they have historically seen an increase in burglaries over the autumn and winter months when it gets dark early and we fill our homes with gifts in readiness for Christmas.

However, there are quick steps we can take to help keep our homes, vehicles and valuables as secure as possible, limiting the opportunity for thieves.

Do you secure your home and garden?

Burglars are often opportunists who will target an open window, an unlocked door or valuables on display if they think they can get away with it.

Did you know?

Many burglaries happen on weekdays, in daylight, when you're more likely to be out. As well as locking doors and windows using the keys each time you leave you can also:

- keep keys, cash and expensive items away from doors and windows, out of view
- use timer switches on lights and radios to make your home look occupied
- repair broken or faulty windows or doors
- keep gates locked and boundaries secure
- lock away bikes, tools and garden items which could be stolen or used to break into your home.

Find out more on Kent Police's website www.kent.police.uk and search for 'Kent against Burglary'.

New Year - New You!

With the New Year coming up shortly many people will be thinking about the positive changes they can make to their lives in 2022. ASPIRE is an exciting new programme to help you lose weight, improve your overall health and wellbeing, learn new skills and access opportunities for employment. Come and spend time in our wonderful kitchen garden, learn how to grow your own food and cook healthy meals from scratch, and spend time with like-minded people. There is a wealth of support, advice and expertise, and training courses – it's all FREE and you can join any time.

If you're over 18 and want to start making positive changes, contact our friendly team to find out how we can help you transform your life. Phone 01304 840134 or email enquiries@bechange.org.uk



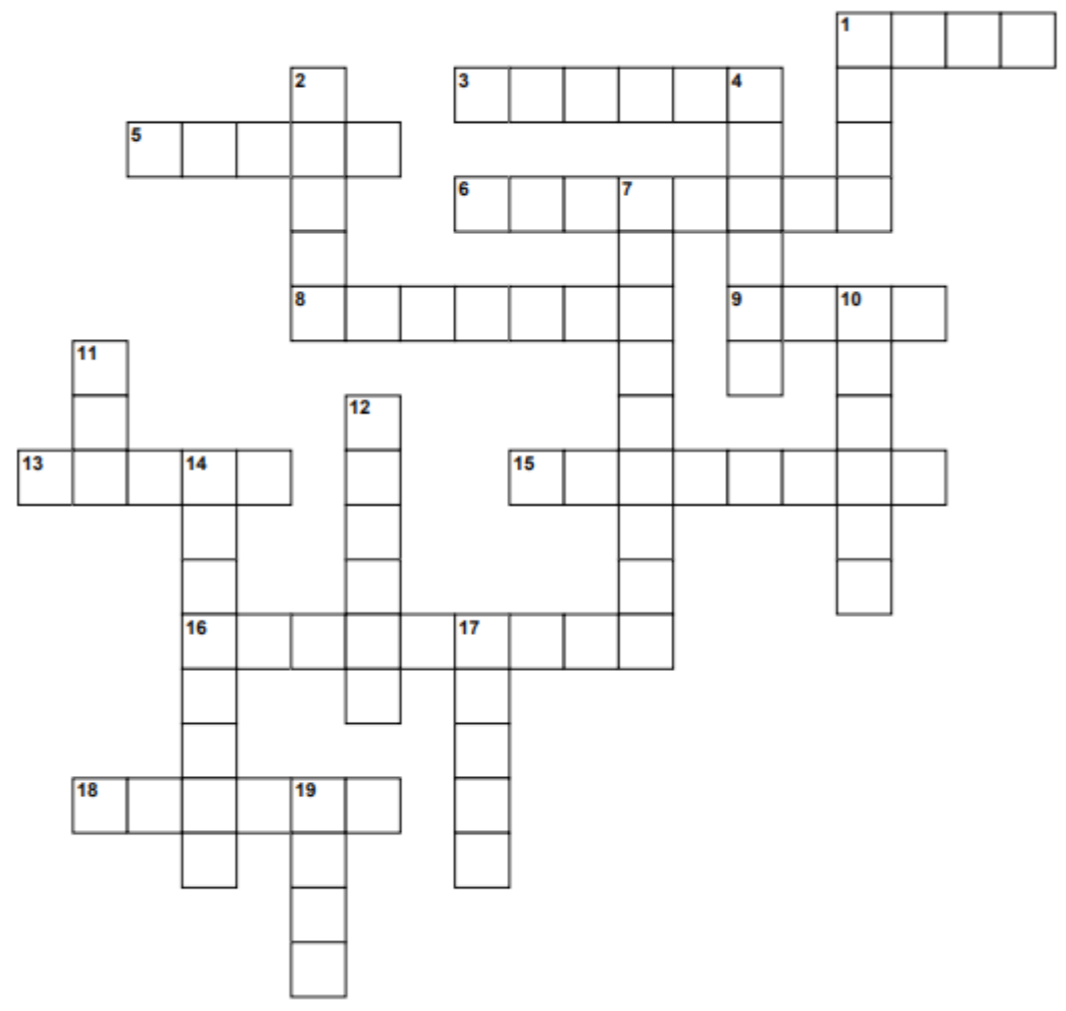
Christmas fun!

ACROSS

- [1] What goes on top of the tree
- [3] Christmas Drink
- [5] Santa's Helpers
- [6] A sock that hangs by the chimney
- [8] Frosty the _____
- [9] What Santa gives to bad boys and girls
- [13] Seasons Greeting _____ Christmas
- [15] Month Christmas is celebrated
- [16] Where Santa's workshop is located
- [18] Santa's Ride

DOWN

- [1] What Carolers do
- [2] Jingle _____
- [4] Who Stole Christmas
- [7] Red and White Christmas lolly
- [10] Chocolate Christmas Calendar
- [11] Pumpkin or mincemeat
- [12] Christmas Door decoration
- [14] Rudolph the Red Nose _____
- [17] Celebration
- [19] Another word for present



Strawberry Father Christmas Recipe



What you need:

- Strawberries
- Whipped Cream

Directions:

1. Wash your strawberries and slice off the stalk and flip them upside down.
2. Cut the tip off your strawberry and use a little whip cream to stick it back down.
3. Add a tiny dot of whipped cream to the tip of the strawberry, and two little dots down the front.

Remember: always ask a grown up to help using a knife.



Christmas Opening hours

We will be closed from 25th December 2021 and will reopen on 4th January 2022.

Bin collection arrangements will be unchanged as Christmas Day falls on a Saturday this year.

Christmas Tree Recycling

Having a real tree this year?

Dover District Council offers a real Christmas tree recycling service to all its garden waste subscribers.

There are also Household Waste Recycling Centres in Honeywood Road in Whitfield, Southwall Road in Deal and Ramsgate Road in Richborough, near Sandwich where you can take your trees and other recycling.



Please cut out and keep these important phone numbers

Useful numbers for your Housing Service

You can reach us during normal working hours (9am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday) on one of our two new telephone numbers:

For Tenancy matters call **01304 801084**

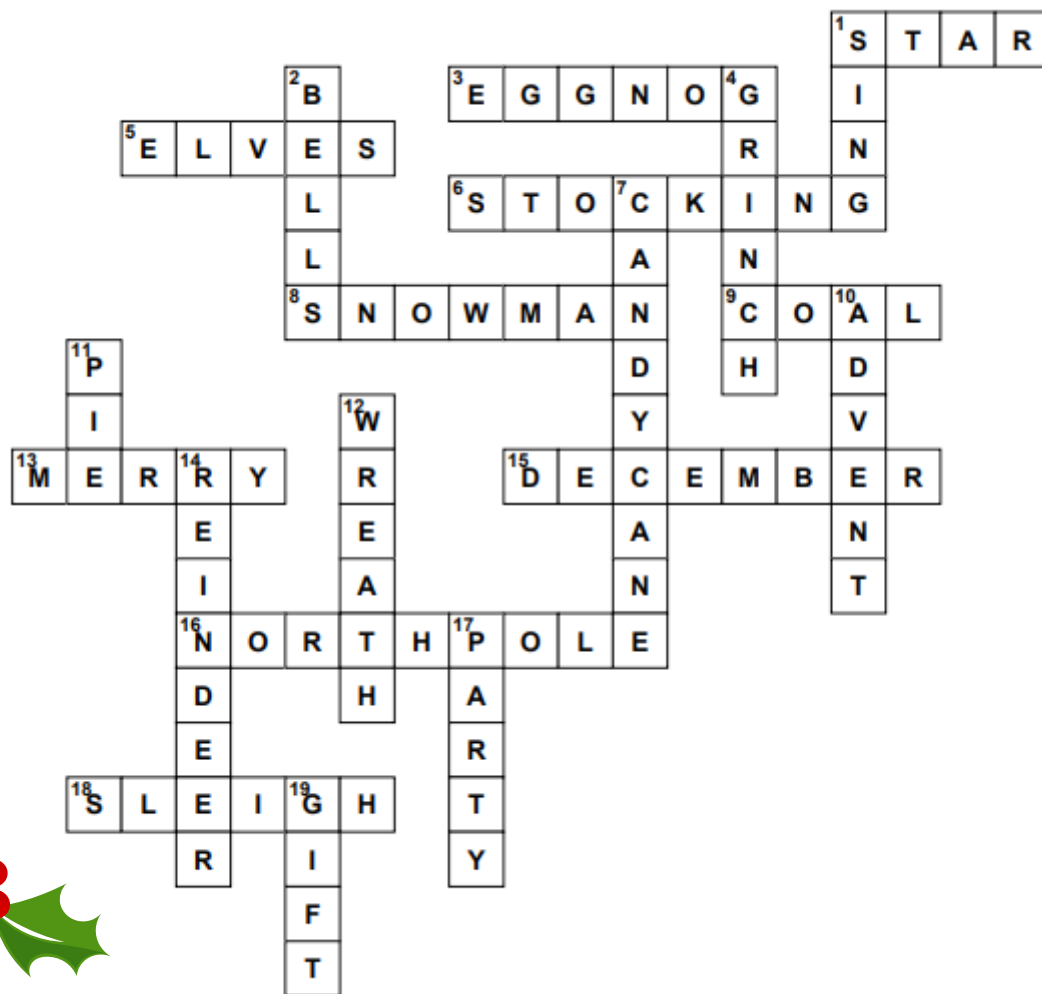
For housing maintenance issues including disabled adaptations, ongoing works and permissions, our new number is **01304 801110**

As usual you can call Mears for household and communal repairs on **0800 0234 320** or email dover.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk.

For central heating repairs call Gas Call Services on **0800 012 9958** or email DDCcustomerservices@gascall.co.uk.

For other ways to get in touch, visit our website and click on the section 'Housing for Tenants'.

Answers!



Ernie the Elf answers



- Page 3
Answer: What date will we be launching the new phone number?
01 December 2021.
- Page 4
Answer: Who is our Tenant Involvement Officer?
Beth Becks
- Page 5
Answer: How much is the total we're giving out for all our poster competition prizes?
£150 (£50 per category and there are 3 categories).
- Page 6
Answer: Why should you not put Christmas decorations in communal areas?
Because it's an obstruction in event of a fire.
- Page 8
Answer: What percentage of our blocks have had a water safety assessment?
100%
- Page 11
Answer: How much money could you save with the warm Home Discount Scheme?
£140
- Page 12
Answer: How could someone commit Tenancy Fraud in their Right to Buy application?
By using false information