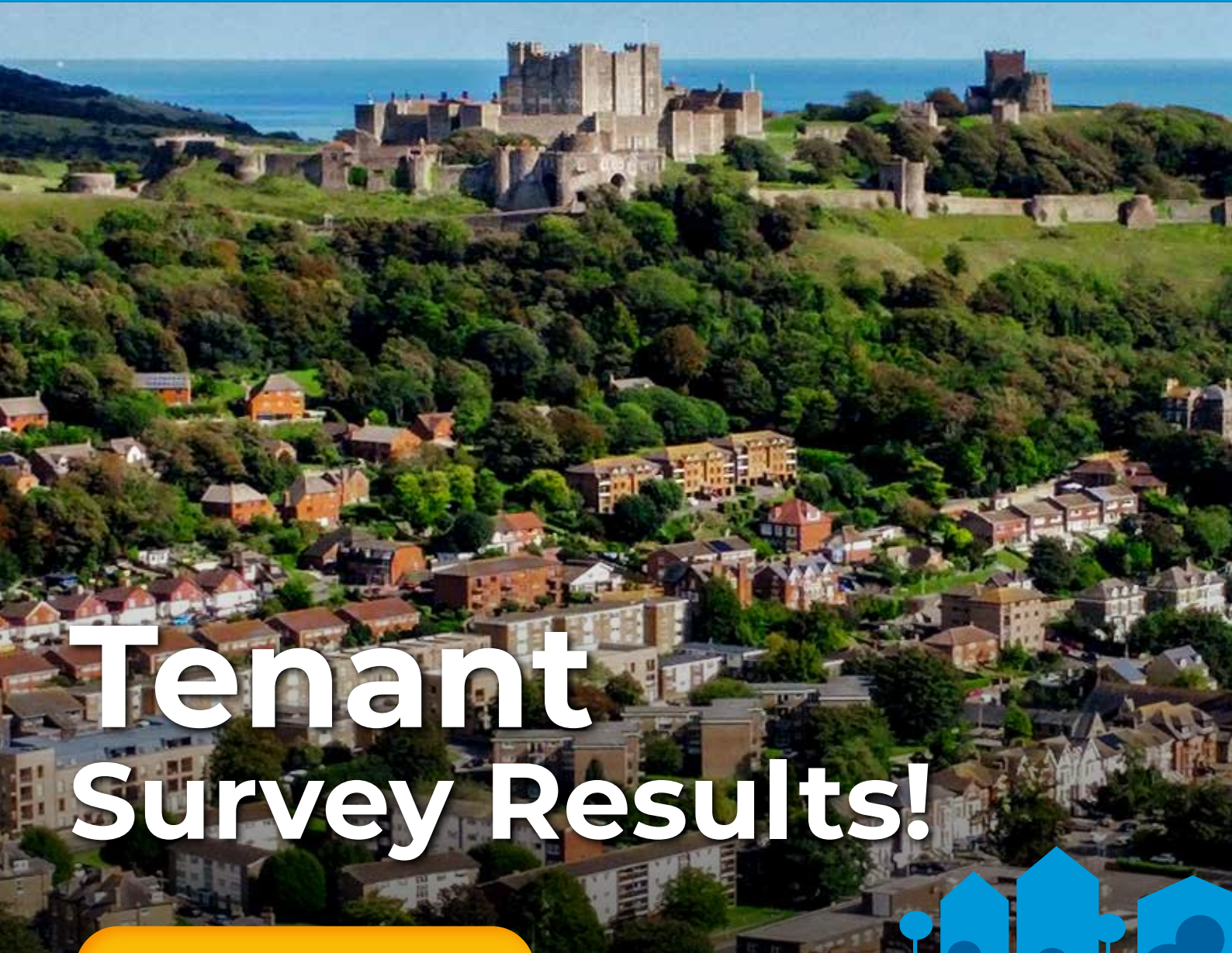




TENANT NEWS

Edition 7
Winter
2023



Tenant Survey Results!



What's in the magazine

- Garden Competition winners
- A Tenant's Perspective of gardening with a disability
- Read a 'day in the life' of one of our Maintenance Inspectors!
- Advice on mobility scooters, bed bugs, how to raise a complaint and more!

Welcome

We are excited to bring you the latest edition of our tenant newsletter, packed with updates, insights, and resources tailored just for you. In this edition, we celebrate the vibrant spirit of our community by announcing the remarkable winners of the Garden Competition, showcasing the dedication you've put into creating beautiful outdoor spaces. Your efforts are a wonderful addition to our estates, so thank you to everyone who takes pride in their surroundings.

Furthermore, we're thrilled to share the results of the recent Tenant Survey, reflecting our commitment to continuously enhance your Housing Service. Your feedback shapes our actions, and we're dedicated to turning your insights into tangible improvements. Thank you to everyone who completed their survey, and we will be launching another survey

for 2024, to bring them to you every year to help us keep track of what you think of our service. We understand the importance of a comfortable and well-maintained home, so we're including information on how to report anything to our responsive Repairs Team. Thank you for being an integral part of our community. Your well-

being and satisfaction remain at the heart of our efforts, and we hope you find this newsletter informative and engaging.



Welcome from our Housing Portfolio Holder

In my first 6 months as Portfolio Holder for Housing, Skills & Education, I have spent much of my time attending walkabouts and estate events with the Housing Team, ensuring that I have an opportunity to speak with residents, and keep up to date with the day-to-day issues facing the communities.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Tenant Survey by sharing their views and helping to improve the service. I had the honour of drawing the names of the 3 prize winners. I was also privileged to see all the wonderful entries to the Garden Competition, what a fantastic show of effort! I look forward to seeing all the lovely entries next year, if you are proud of your garden, why not enter next year!

Consultative Group, who have put in many hours of their own time to volunteer to help improve services and be a voice for tenants across the district. Their dedication is very much appreciated. If you would like to join the DDTCCG, they would love to hear from you, especially if you'd like to be secretary as they have a vacancy.

I have also attended meetings with our Dover District Tenants'



Contacting us

Email housing@dover.gov.uk or call us on 01304 801084 about Housing Management enquires only.

Household and communal repairs:
Email Mears at dover.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk or call 0800 023 4320.

Gas, hot water and central heating repairs:
Email Gas Call Services at DDC-customerservices@gascall.co.uk or call 0800 012 9958.

Talk to DDC about ongoing repairs, permissions and planned work such as roofs, kitchens etc: call our property services team on 01304 801110.

Alternatively, you can email housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk for repairs/permissions or housingplannedmaintenance@dover.gov.uk for planned works.

Thank you for completing our Tenant Survey over the summer

We were delighted with the number of residents who responded to our Tenant Survey, to tell us what they thought of our Housing Service. In total, we had over 700 responses! Thank you to everyone who contributed.

The results will be sent to the Regulator of Social Housing, who will be compiling tenant satisfaction across the nation, in the first of its kind, an Ofsted style check on all social housing providers. You might remember that we advertised the survey in our previous newsletter, but we also sent a paper copy of the survey and asked you to complete the survey via Keep Me Posted, direct email, Facebook, via the phone, in person at existing visits and also at our 13 summer 'meet the team' events. We wanted to give every tenant the opportunity to complete the survey.

Skills and Education, selected the winners at random from the survey respondents who entered the prize draw.



Calvin Stothart, from Eythorne won the £200 prize, with his brother Anthony accepting the prize on his behalf. Anthony said, "Wow, Calvin will be absolutely over the moon. Thank you so much!"



Pictured above is the Dover District Tenants' Consultative Group with Cllr Pam Brivio selecting the prize winners, and Anthony Stothart accepting the top prize.

Other prize winners included a resident in Ash Grove, Elvington winning the £100 prize and a resident in Molland Close, Ash receiving the £50 prize. Congratulations to the winners!

Tenant Satisfaction Measure	% of Tenants Satisfied
Overall satisfaction	68%
Satisfaction with repairs	73%
Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair	58%
Satisfaction that the home is well maintained	64%
Satisfaction that the home is safe	67%
Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	50%
Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	57%
Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect	69%
Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints	34%
Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained	55%
Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods	48%
Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour	40%

Learning from what you're telling us:

- Tenants' satisfaction with the repairs service has improved since we took Housing back in house, this is great news and shows that improvements we've put in place are working. We will continue to work hard and strive for continued tenant satisfaction with the repairs service.
- You've told us that only 34% of you are satisfied with our approach to complaints, we will be including information about how you can raise a complaint in this newsletter and continue to provide guidance about complaints when we communicate with you.



Estate Events

Over the summer 2023, the DDC Housing team visited 13 estates across the Dover district, in an attempt to hear directly from residents and give them the opportunity to speak to us.

We want to hear from you and see if there are any improvements we can make and if it's something you'd like us to do next year.



Scan the QR code or visit www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/EstateEvents to complete the survey



The Winners!

We will advertise the next Garden Competition in May and June next year, so please keep a look out if you're interested in taking part and possibly winning a prize to celebrate your hard work.



First Place: Janet Giles, Ash
Second Place: Jane Lowe, Deal
Highly Commended: June Bailey, Woodnesborough



A special thanks was given to residents who take on a garden as a new tenant or through the mutual exchange process and spend the time and effort to make it beautiful.

First Place: Cheryl Dunn, Worth
Second Place: David Hobbs, Woodnesborough



For Outstanding Contribution to the Community:

Dean Hughes, Walmer
 Allen Green, Walmer

Thank You for Participating:

Sylvia Armstrong, Aylesham
 Paul Gillard, Dover
 Gerald Clewley, Sandwich
 Tina Nightingale, Dover

Garden Competition Success!

Dover District Council runs a Garden Competition in partnership with the Dover District Tenants' Consultative Group to celebrate the hard work of our most talented gardeners.

Thank you to everyone who entered the Garden Competition, we were thrilled with the amount and standard of the entries, especially given that we have been unable to run the competition since 2019.

The closing date was in June, the judging took place in July, and then the prize giving ceremony

was held at the DDC Offices in August. Congratulations to all the worthy winners and all the wonderful entrants.



First Place: Blodwen Mary Francis, West Hougham
Second Place: David Hobbs, Woodnesborough
Highly Commended: Midge Smith & Jane Lowe, Deal

Let's hear from one of our fantastic Tenant Gardeners, with advice on how to garden with a disability

Gardening to me is a pleasure not a chore. It's my little area of tranquillity, my area of therapy, my place to forget about the rest of the world and enjoy what I have created. Nothing pleases me more than being told that I have a beautiful garden, it means that my hard work has been worth it and not just for me.

With debilitating medical issues it's not easy but I've learnt over time how to continue to do my garden with adapting how I do things. I prefer to grow things in pots this means that I don't have to bend down so far to dead head and weed and with the use of a wheeled garden stool I can sit while working.

I divide my garden into sections, top, bottom, left and right sides and make lists of what needs doing, dead head, weed, water for example, then slowly work my way down the lists only aiming to do one section a day but if I'm having a good day I may do more or a bad day less. The more often I go through the lists the less there is to do. I know that if I overdo it I will be out of action for the next few days and if I have to go anywhere I don't do any garden the day before just to be safe.

I find it difficult to hold tools so I bandage the handles to make them thicker and easier to hold and control. I have an insulated jug of coffee out in the garden so that when I do need a break I can sit, rest and admire my garden then carry on when I've rested because if I go indoors I might not go back out.

Even if I'm having a bad day I grab a coffee and force myself to go outside



intending to just sit and enjoy what I can see but you can guarantee that whilst admiring I will spot a weed or a dead head and I've just got to go and rectify it then I spot another and before you know it I've managed to do a couple of hours and my coffee has gone cold.



You don't have to have plants to make your garden look good, string art on a plain fence can brighten up a dull fence. Paint a windy path onto steps with tiny fairy doors makes people think little people live there. Different colours of slate or sizes of shingle can simply give the illusion of a path that's not there, and keeping the weeds at bay on it is a doddle. Ornaments are also a garden filler and take no maintenance.



I even turned my old coal bunkers into compost bins meaning I get fresh homemade compost every year. Anyhow gardening should be a pleasure not a chore, do your garden to please you, if you don't want plants don't have them, it's your garden after all.

By June Bailey

Important

It is in the terms of your tenancy agreement that you agree to upkeep your garden. If you are unable to do it yourself, there is an expectation that you must seek assistance in order to do so, this could mean that you employ a gardener to help or ask friends/family/neighbours.

Your garden doesn't have to be fit for the Chelsea Flower Show, but it must be maintained and clear of rubbish.

This includes ensuring that you keep lawns cut and hedges trimmed – your garden must not constitute a hazard or a nuisance to others in the area.

Many individuals with a disability or health condition will receive additional benefits in recognition of this – such as Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (in Universal Credit), Disabled person's Tax Credits, Personal Independence Payments or Attendance Allowance. These monies are intended to help you with

additional costs incurred as a result of your health condition or disability. You are free to spend these funds as you wish but can utilise them to keep your home clean and safe by purchasing additional services to help you.

If you decide that the upkeep of your property is no longer possible, you can discuss options for a move to a more manageable property with your Housing Officer. You would need to continue to maintain your property until a move were agreed.

Be Alert and Be Scam Aware

In today's digital age, staying informed and vigilant about various scams is paramount to safeguarding your financial well-being. Scammers continue to employ sophisticated tactics, ranging from unsolicited cold calls to elaborate online fraud schemes. As your trusted housing provider, we believe in empowering you with the knowledge and tools to protect yourself against such threats.

Cold Callers and Phone Scams:

- **Be cautious:** if you receive an unexpected call from someone claiming to be a representative from a bank, government agency, or other organisation, exercise caution. Scammers often impersonate trusted organisations to gain your trust.
- **Verify caller identity:** if the caller claims to be from a legitimate organisation, ask them for your unique reference number or information about yourself that they should know if you're their customer.

If your Housing Officer is calling, they will always tell you their name and introduce themselves as your Housing Officer.

Alternatively, you could hang up and call the official customer service number yourself. This ensures you're speaking to a genuine representative.

- **Never Share Sensitive Information:** legitimate organisations will never ask for personal details like

passwords or bank information over the phone.

Online and Email Scams:

- **Stay sceptical of unsolicited emails:** be wary of emails claiming you've won a prize, inherited money, or requesting urgent action. These can be phishing attempts to gain access to your personal information.
- **Inspect email addresses:** check the sender's email address carefully. Scammers often use email addresses that resemble official ones but contain small variations.
- **Avoid clicking suspicious links:** hover your cursor over links before clicking to see where they lead. Never provide personal information on websites you access through email links.

Social Media and Online Transactions:

- **Limit personal information:** avoid sharing sensitive personal details on social media. Scammers can

use this information to create convincing targeted scams.

- **Verify online sellers:** if you're buying items online, use reputable platforms and sellers. Verify their reviews and ratings before making a purchase.

- **Secure payment methods:** use secure payment options like credit cards when making online purchases. Avoid using wire transfers or prepaid cards.

Protective Measures:

- **Educate yourself:** stay informed about the latest scams and tactics that scammers use. Knowledge is your best defence.

- **Trust your instincts:** if something feels off, don't hesitate to question or verify before taking any action.

- **Report suspicious activity:** if you encounter a scam or suspicious activity, report it to relevant authorities or organizations, such as Action Fraud in the UK.

Stay vigilant, stay informed, and stay safe.

How to know Dover District Council is contacting you

We will always endeavour to make an appointment to attend your property.

If we have been unable to contact you, or we suspect tenancy fraud, or in the event of an emergency, an Officer may attend your property unannounced.

- **Dover District Council employees will ALWAYS carry ID.**
- **Dover District Council employees will welcome your wish to verify their identity.**
- **Dover District Council employees would encourage you to contact a publicly advertised number (on our website, on a headed letter, in our Tenants' Newsletter).** They will not provide you with a number to call unless you ask; and that number

would be our Housing Duty Line: 01304 801084

- **Dover District Council employees will not take any cash payment at the doorstep.**

You cannot pay any outstanding rent, Council Tax or invoices to our staff directly. If you are requested to do this by anyone posing as a Council Officer please close the door and report a crime in progress to 999 if they remain on your doorstep, or 101 if they leave the property and you no longer feel in immediate danger. Please also report concerns to the Dover District Council Housing Duty Line so that we can inform neighbours of suspicious activity in the area and to be extra vigilant.

If you are asked to or wish to make any payment, please use our publicly advertised numbers: our automated payment line is 01304 872345. Other ways to pay can be found on our website or by contacting our Housing Duty Line on 01304 801084.

If you are concerned that you have been asked to pay money you do not owe – please call 01304 801084. Dover District Council will always send you a rent statement, Council Tax bill or copy invoice if you ask and can explain how these charges arose.

Struggling to make ends meet?

With continuing issues around the cost of living, and many wages struggling to keep up, we wanted to give you some helpful advice and resources.

Southern Water

Southern Water is set to increase its prices to help pay for improvement works to the infrastructure. They have options

available to those on a low income and struggling to pay their bills. Check the Southern Water website to see if you can benefit

from their WaterSure, Water Direct, NewStart or Essentials tariff at Southernwater.co.uk or call 0800 027 0800.



What if I can't pay my bill? (southernwater.co.uk)

Please check with all your utility providers to ensure you have the best rate for you. You can contact Affinity Water on 0345 357 2401.

Cost of Living Payments

You might be eligible for a cost of living payment, based on your receipt of benefits within the qualifying periods.

Please see the schedule below:

How Much	Eligibility	When you'll receive it
£300	If you are in receipt of one of these benefits on 17th September 2023: Universal Credit Income-based JSA Income-based ESA Income Support Pension Credit	Between 31 October and 19 November 2023 for most people
£300	Tax credits and no other low income benefit	Between 10 November and 19 November 2023 for most people
£299	Universal Credit Income-based JSA Income-based ESA Income Support Pension Credit	By spring 2024 for most people
£299	Tax credits and no other low income benefit	By spring 2024 for most people



Better Housing, Better Health

Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) is a longstanding service working to reduce the number of people in fuel poverty and improve domestic warmth & wellbeing.

It is coordinated by the National Energy Foundation but involves many other organisations across the following regions, with cross-referral mechanism in place to maximise the benefit to residents of each organisation's field of expertise.

Their experienced team provides free, confidential, and tailored solutions to meet a home's specific circumstances including

switching energy suppliers, maximising income, signing up to the Priority Services Register, and accessing funding to help support them.

They can help you with:

- Energy switching
- Home energy visits
- Energy bill discounts and grants
- Priority Services Register

- Energy Vouchers (if eligible or available).

Please call them on 0800 107 0044 or bhbh@nef.org.uk if you need any support or assistance.



Litter Lotto

The LitterLotto is a free mobile phone app which provides the opportunity for users to win on the spot prizes and weekly jackpots for 'doing the right thing and putting their litter in the bin'. It is downloadable from both the App Store on IOS and Google Play store on Android phones.

Once you have downloaded the app, you simply use it to take a photograph as you place your litter in the bin. All litter counts, from a single cigarette stub, to a takeaway meal box.

Each time you bin a piece of litter, you get another entry into the LitterLotto weekly jackpot of £1,000 and more chances to win spot prizes between £5 and £250 and the newly introduced LitterLotto Coins.



To ensure people don't cheat, it has algorithms in place and all winning entries are verified before pay out.

In support of the Great British Spring Clean campaign, which took place in March 2023, DDC provided two additional weekly local jackpots of £100.

Our local Great British Spring Clean winners were Linda Ford and Jen Dutton both from Deal, Kent pictured alongside.



Tenancy Fraud

Tenancy fraud is when people are living in DDC homes without the right to do so. It's against the law and a breach of our tenancy agreement. It also denies homes to those most in need.

The different types of tenancy fraud

- Unlawful subletting - where a tenant rents out their home without our knowledge or permission
- Wrongly-claimed succession - where a resident dies and someone without entitlement tries to take over or succeed the tenancy
- False Right To Buy/Right To Acquire - where a tenant gives false information in a Right to Buy or Right to Acquire application
- Key selling - where a resident is paid to pass on their keys in return for a one-off payment
- Unlawful assignment - where a resident stops using their tenancy as their main home and allows another person to live there without our permission
- Obtaining housing by deception - where a person gets a home by

giving false information on their housing application.

We carry out regular tenancy checks to make sure that the right people are living in our properties and we always investigate reports of possible tenancy fraud. We have an agreement with Ashford Borough Council, who have highly skilled and experienced Officers who investigate fraud on our behalf.



Report tenancy fraud

If you think someone in your area may be subletting their home or living elsewhere, please report this to us. Any information you give us will be treated in confidence and your identity will be protected.

Want to Move?

Have You Thought About a Mutual Exchange?

One of the quickest and easiest ways you can move home is by doing a mutual exchange.

A mutual exchange is a home swap between two social housing tenants, they can be from a local authority (like DDC) or a Housing Association. It can happen for many reasons, such as needing more (or less) space, moving for work or to be closer to family. It's a great option for tenants who can't access or don't want to wait for the normal allocation process. It gives you more control and means you're able to choose a home that suits your needs better in a place you want to live.

To qualify for a mutual exchange, you must have the following:

- A secure or flexible tenancy with Dover District Council. Introductory or demoted tenancies cannot exchange until they become secure
- No rent arrears on your rent account

- The property must be suitable to your needs, such as the correct amount of bed spaces for your need and suitability if you're disabled
- Be in good standing, with no ASB, notices or suspended possession orders
- Subject to a maintenance inspection and reference from your Housing Officer.

The mutual exchange process is completed mostly online, where you'll need to sign up for a HomeSwapper account. HomeSwapper is a really useful website, used up and down the country for you to find your match and complete all the registration and required tasks.

In addition to using HomeSwapper, we will expect that you visit the property you'd like to sign up to as you will have to agree to take the property 'as seen'. This means that any repairs that need to happen, must be completed before you move as you will be responsible for

any repairs that have existed under the previous tenant.

If you've signed up to HomeSwapper and haven't found anyone that wants to swap, consider taking lots of photos and 'showcase' your home.

Think about lighting and making sure it is clean and bright. We recommend protecting your home and identity by not including any photos of valuables or people.

Make sure all repairs are completed and it's presentable. Think about all the good things about your home, the community and why you enjoy living there.



Visit www.homeswapper.co.uk to get started, Homeswapper is free to use once you connect to Dover District Council.

Beware of 'no win, no fee' claims for housing disrepair

We are aware that some of our tenants have been approached by housing disrepair companies encouraging them to make housing disrepair claims against Dover District Council (DDC) with promises of compensation. These approaches may be by telephone or social media, a leaflet through your door, or even in person.

If your property has fallen into disrepair through no fault of your own and DDC has failed to repair faults which you have reported to us you may have a claim and it is of course your right to instruct a solicitor. Please be reminded however, that if you are unhappy with our service or response you can raise a complaint to the Council and onwards to the Ombudsman where the complaint process has been exhausted. The

Ombudsman service is free and simple to use, impartial, independent of DDC, non-adversarial, faster and broader in scope than a housing disrepair claim. Housing disrepair companies have been reminded that for social housing tenants the Ombudsman should be the first route for reporting complaints with their landlord.

For those individuals who decide to pursue a housing disrepair claim, they usually operate on a 'no win, no fee' basis. Make sure you read the small print before signing any legal contract including 'no win, no fee' contracts. Some agreements for example, have clauses in them that state all the lawyers' costs must be paid in full even if you decide not to pursue the claim at a later stage. This could put you at serious financial risk.

Our suggestion to you:

- We want you to understand your rights and know how to resolve any repair and disrepair issues directly with us.
- You do not have to sign a contract immediately. Always read through any documents including all the small print before signing them. Make sure you understand all the terms and conditions. If you don't understand anything, ask for clarification.
- You can change your mind. If you sign a contract you have a legal right to cancel the contract within 14 days without any consequences. This cooling off period is a legal requirement for all contracts that are entered into remotely, even if this is not set out in writing. Should you cancel after the 14 days you will likely be responsible for costs.

- You may not be aware that if you were to progress your matter through our complaints process, you may be entitled to compensation, and your repairs will be completed in a much shorter timescale, and finally there is no financial risk to yourself.
- If you are still not satisfied, you are able to complain directly to the Ombudsman, who may agree a compensation payment. Our complaints procedure and the Ombudsman process can be utilised even after a Letter of Claim has been received however, you may be then be bound by the terms of your no win, no fee agreement.

What can you do if you have genuine disrepair in your home?

DDC is committed to carrying out repairs we are responsible for within a reasonable time, giving priority

to urgent repairs. If you have any outstanding repairs or feel you have a case of disrepair in your home, we would urge you to report it to us so we can investigate the situation and put things right.

The easiest way to report a repair is by visiting our website



Alternatively you can email our customer service team housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk or call 01304 801110

If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, please speak to us first so we can try to reach a solution. Further information can be found online



Damp and Mould – How to prevent it

It's the time of the year again where damp and mould issues spike. This is due to many factors including increased rainfall and reduced ventilation in properties. Normally this is due to the weather getting colder and windows and doors being kept shut.



If you're experiencing any damp and mould, please visit our website for more information.



Complaints

When things go wrong

In the Housing Service we are committed to ensuring that your living experience in our properties is safe, comfortable, and meets your needs. We understand that there may be times when you encounter issues or have concerns that need our attention. We value your feedback, and your voice matters in helping us improve our services. In this edition of the newsletter, we'd like to guide you through the process of raising a complaint with your council housing service.

Why Raise a Complaint?

Complaints are a crucial way for us to learn about issues and concerns affecting our tenants and leaseholders. Whether you're unhappy with a maintenance problem, you're unhappy with a delay or time taken to do something or an issue with a contractor, or any other matter related to your housing service,

your feedback helps us identify areas where improvements are needed. By raising a complaint, you contribute to making our service the best it can be, it's a vital form of feedback.

What's Not a Complaint?

A service request is not a complaint. If you're asking or wanting something to be completed for you, please contact

the correct team using the correct method first to get your request dealt with quicker. Using the complaints process for a service request will cause a delay in your request reaching the correct team. A complaint can be made after a service request has been made if you're unhappy with the process or time taken.

How to Raise a Complaint:

Contact us! You can raise a complaint in any way; by phone, by email, by online form, in person or in writing, whichever is most convenient to you.

We recommend that it is often best to raise a complaint in

writing, as this often provides the most accurate opportunity to provide details, which can be investigated.

- Provide details: when raising a complaint, be as specific as possible about the issue. Include relevant dates, times, and locations. Clear and detailed information helps us

understand your situation better

- Document the issue: if applicable, take photos or videos of the issue you're complaining about. This visual evidence can be helpful in assessing and resolving the problem more effectively.

Complaints - What's the Process?

Stage 1 - to the Department

The people who can best deal with any problems you have are those who directly provide the service. If you are not happy with the way you have been treated by the Council, you should contact the Department concerned who will write to you and tell you what action we have taken or explain the position.

Stage 2 - to the Corporate Services Officer

If you are unhappy with the outcome of Stage 1, you can take the matter further and ask that a member of the Council's Corporate Services team consider the matter.

They will aim to respond within 20 working days. You can contact the Corporate Services team on email at ddccomplaints@dover.gov.uk.

Please make your Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of receiving the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint. If this would be a problem, please get in touch with us.

The Housing Ombudsman

If you remain unhappy with how the Housing Department has resolved your complaint, you may escalate your complaint to the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman will work with you and the housing service

at Dover District Council to resolve the dispute under their early resolution procedure. The Ombudsman may decide to carry out an investigation, however they only do this for those complaints where they decide an investigation is proportionate to the circumstances and evidence, for example complex complaints involving many issues.

For more information and to escalate a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, please visit their website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or call them on 0300 111 3000.



Learning From Feedback and Complaints

When a complaint or feedback is made, we always aim to resolve the issue at hand, but we also focus on using this information to improve the service for tenants and leaseholders across the district.

One example of this was when a tenant gave us feedback via email following the appointment of two new Estate Officers. The tenant was pleased with their implementation but wanted to be able to spot them when they were out and about on estates. To remedy this, we ensured their

photos were featured in the December 2021 newsletter and an article for 'a day in the life' was written to improve visibility and understanding of these roles and help encourage tenants to approach and converse with these new Officers when they are on estates. Since then, we've

highlighted different members of the team in each edition, with Paul Flewker being featured in this edition.

Adaptions

If you have a disability, we can provide qualifying tenants certain adaptations to help them remain independent in their home and enjoy a good quality of life. Examples of adaptations could be hand rails, grab rails, and wet rooms, amongst others.

Do you qualify for disabled adaptations?

First of all you will need to contact the Occupational Therapists who will assess your medical needs during a home visit which will be used to make a referral to us for adaptation work to happen.

How to contact Occupational Therapists:

- For adult services (Over 18's) call 03000 416161
- For children services (Under 18's) call 03000 411111

- For minor adaptations (hand or grab rails) email social.services@kent.gov.uk

Once we receive a recommendation from your Occupational Therapist we will consider the request.



It's important to get in contact with the Occupational Therapists as soon as possible, so you can be visited and a referral can be made.

How we decide if work can be done

We consult our Disabled Adaptations Policy to decide if the work qualifies or not. Please note, there are times when we may not be able to carry out adaptation work to your home, these include:

- Under-occupancy – when a person (s) may be living in a home with more bedrooms than they need
- Overcrowding - when a person (s) is living in a home which doesn't not have enough bedrooms for the people who live there
- Tenancy termination – if your tenancy is due to end because of rent arrears, potential transfer to another property, or you have applied for Right to Buy
- Unsuitability of property – the works required may not be suitable to the type of property you live in. This can be because of the property's location, layout, construction type for example.

In some instances, moving home will be a more suitable option, this might be because your flat is above ground floor, or it is too big or small for your needs. Please contact us if you'd like to discuss this.

Mobility Scooters

Dover District Council is committed to providing homes that are safe. We respect that mobility scooters are a very useful mobility device to broaden the lives of some of our residents. We support the use of mobility scooters, where safe for them to be used.

Mobility scooter batteries are extremely flammable and scooters pose an obstruction to fire escape routes, with this in mind DDC has a zero-tolerance approach to mobility scooters being stored or charged in any area of our buildings that:

- Form a fire escape route for residents
- Are in locations where there should be nothing stored that is an ignition source and fire load.

To reduce the risk to tenants, all mobility scooters must have an up-to-date Portable Appliance Test (PAT) certificate paid by the resident and supplied to DDC on an annual basis.

The upholstery on the mobility scooters must be fire retardant and other flammable materials must not be present. Where the mobility scooter is considered a class 3 vehicle, residents should ensure that they are registered with the DVLA and have adequate insurance.

Residents will be held liable for the cost of any damage to the interior or exterior of council buildings or communal areas including gardens caused by mobility scooters.

Residents must seek permission to use, store and/or charge a mobility scooter by completing the 'Mobility Scooter Permissions Form' which is

available on our website or a printed copy can be provided on request.

Residents living in sheltered accommodation should speak to their Independent Living Manager about registering for a space in one of the specifically provided mobility scooter charging points provided for sheltered accommodation.

Completed applications should be returned to the Housing Services team who will arrange for an assessment to be conducted of the application and suitability of the building. This is to ensure health and safety is not compromised and insurance requirements are met.

If conditions are not met by residents, we have a range of enforcement options, from service of a notice on the scooter which enables us to dispose of it, to taking action against a tenancy.

A Day in the Life of a Maintenance Inspector

This edition of 'day in the life' is one of our Maintenance Inspectors, Paul Flewker.

What does a normal day entail?

My day includes lots of inspections! On average I visit around 5 or 6 properties each day on my patch in the Deal area. These range from damp and mould inspections, inspecting to raise works with a contractor and also inspecting work once it's done to sign it off.

Before and after visiting properties, I have to do a range of tasks to be prepared for the inspection and follow up with contractors, check our planned maintenance forward plans and deal with ongoing enquiries and issues.

I always follow up with all my inspections to make sure that all work is complete before I sign it off.



What's the best thing about your job?

I enjoy interacting with our tenants and helping to resolve their repairs. The tenant and

myself have a shared goal, which is to make their property a safe, and nice home to enjoy. It's rewarding when we get things done.

I also like the varied nature of my job, I deal with so many different properties, issues and residents. No two days are the same.

How long have you been at DDC?

I joined in August 2022, and have been at the council for 15 months now.

What did you do before you joined DDC?

Before I started at DDC, I was on the tools and employed as a multi trade operative. My years of being on the tools gives me a broad general knowledge of building and maintenance.

New Regulatory Standards and Powers for the Housing Ombudsman

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act received royal assent in Parliament in July 2023, making a host of reforms into law. The Act introduces many new obligations that landlords like Dover District Council will have to follow, while giving more powers to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the Housing Ombudsman.

It introduces 'Ofsted-like' inspections of providers, carried out by the RSH, with as little as 48 hours' notice, while the RSH can now order landlords to carry out emergency remedial work and issue unlimited fines.

It also allows tenants to directly refer their cases to the Housing Ombudsman.

Changes to social housing regulation were first proposed in the wake of the Grenfell Tower

Housing Ombudsman Service

tragedy. All these changes are a drive to improve lives of tenants, by driving up standards in Social Housing and making providers more transparent and accountable.

Dover District Council has already been working to meet these new

standards, including by running the Tenant Perception Survey this summer. See more details about what you said and what we will be doing at the start of this newsletter.

Keeping Pests at Bay



You might have seen in the national news that bed bug infestations are on the rise, we want to share with you some advice on how to deal with infestations if you are unfortunate enough to become affected.

What to do if you get bed bugs?

- Strip all beds of linen and wash in as hot a water as possible
- Ensure the bedroom floor is clear of obstructions, remove and destroy any rubbish that could contain insects
- The bed frames, skirting and floors of the affected rooms should be sprayed with a residual insecticide
- Do not leave any infected possessions in communal areas or outside. This can increase the chance of spreading the infestation to a neighbour, not to mention the fire risk caused by items in a communal area
- If you are unable to control the infestation, you must call a pest control provider who will treat your property to eliminate the infestation.

Bed bugs can be expensive to treat, so it is very important to prevent bed bugs from occurring and maintain high standards of hygiene and housekeeping to ensure that the presence of bed bugs is revealed at an early stage. Bed bugs often thrive where hygiene standards are poor and

housekeeping is below standard, but they can occur in even the cleanest of homes.

Dover District Council has a preferred pest control provider for you to use, we have secured and agreed reduced rates for all residents in our district.

The cost for bed bugs treatment for 3 visits, minimum charge (up to 6 rooms) is £110.00.

Call 01304 759033 or email them on pestcontrol@agsone.co.uk. Pest control within residential homes is a tenant responsibility.



Get Involved

The Dover District Tenants' Consultative Group (DDTCG) is a local group of Dover District Council tenants and leaseholders.

They are a non-political group that represent the views and interests of tenants and leaseholders across the Dover district. They are independent, and work closely with DDC as a consultative body to resolve issues and recommend improvements to the service.

The DDTCG are looking for new members! Please get in touch.

Do you have experience in admin or secretarial work? Or want to gain those skills?

The group has a vacancy for a secretary to write the minutes for the meeting and prepare the paperwork for the group. Training

and support will be provided by DDC.

Come along to a meeting and see what you think. No pressure

to sign up. **Contact Beth Becks for more information on TenantInvolvement@dover.gov.uk.**

Great news, we're TPAS members!

TPAS is a national non-profit organisation that promote, support and champion tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England.

As DDC is a member it means our tenants can access a range of services to help you become more involved in shaping the services we offer.



- Opportunities to help influence national policy.

Speak to our tenant engagement team about how to access these benefits.

Join online or speak to our Tenant Engagement Officer, Beth Becks about how to access:

- Skills development opportunities
- Fortnightly electronic newsletters to keep you up to date on the tenant engagement agenda and housing news
- The online resource hub for good practice
- Policy briefings, toolkits and example documents from landlords and tenants across the country
- Free Webinars and online events
- The online networking platform 'TPAS Connect' to network with other TPAS tenant members

For more information, visit: www.tpas.org.uk/member-search, select Dover District Council and register your profile.



Don't want to Autobid? Please help us improve our Lettings Service

Have you received a call to view a property and didn't expect it? This may be because you have selected 'Autobid' on your housing application.

Autobid means that the systems DDC use automatically bids for properties that might be suitable for you on your behalf. Sometimes this can contribute to delays as there is a higher percentage of people who turn down properties, causing delays to the tenant moving in. We want to ensure we



are effectively housing people within the district as quickly as possible.

To ensure that the council only contacts prospective residents that are interested in properties they have bid for, and if you do not wish to use the Autobid option, please deselect the Autobid section on your preferences on Kent Homechoice.

Safety and Sustainability



Fire Alarms

Please remember to test your fire alarms every week and report to us any repairs to your smoke alarms.

Fire Doors

Nationally, there have been incidents of fires in blocks of flats which has led to reforms to Fire Regulations, these will come into force this year.

Fire doors are the front line of defence should any incident occur, so it is vitally important that your front door is checked to ensure:

- It is kept closed at all times and not wedged open

- It has no damage either deliberately or due to wear and tear to the door or frame
- The self-closing device is working correctly, not disconnected and closes the door correctly to completion
- The letter box is not damaged with the outside flap in place
- All seals are intact and in place. These seals may be fitted in the frame or the door.

Fire doors in communal areas and stairwells should always be closed and not wedged open as this could allow fire to spread quickly through the communal areas.

Currently we are undertaking trials of new fire doors with the potential that this will lead to a programme of replacing all fire doors to flats and communal areas respectively.

Communal Areas

In the interest of your safety and that of all the residents in your block, please do not store or leave rubbish or personal items in communal areas, landings or stairwells and ensure that all store cupboard doors are kept shut and locked at all times.

When choosing to purchase items such as prams, please select options that suit your storage availability. Many modern prams are lightweight and collapsible

(some with handles and straps), which make it easier to bring up flights of stairs to your flat if you live above the ground floor. There should be no reason to leave any prams or strollers in communal areas.

Please ensure that no Christmas decorations are put in any communal areas due to the obstruction and flammability in the event of a fire.



Recycling

Whether you live in a flat or a house, please ensure that your waste is appropriately separated.



Blue lidded recycling bins

- Glass and plastic bottles and jars (including lids)
- Tins and cans
- Plastic food containers (but not thin plastics like bread bags, bags for life, grape bags, magazine wraps, crisp bags, frozen vegetable bags, shrink wrap plastic that might hold 6 cans of baked beans etc.)



Green food waste bin

- Meat and fish, raw and cooked including bones, fruit and vegetables, raw and cooked. All dairy products such as eggs and cheese, breads, cakes, pastries, rice pasta and beans
- Uneaten food from your plates and dishes, tea bags and coffee grounds.



Black household waste bin

- The very little remaining waste that can't be recycled should be placed in your grey wheeled bin
- Any waste left by the side of the wheeled bin will be left and not collected.

It is your responsibility to dispose of any waste that cannot be collected in your weekly collections, in these circumstances you need to make use of your local Household Waste and Recycling Centre.

This can include bulky items, such as sofas and furniture which in many instances cost you money to transport and dispose of. Please make use of British Heart Foundation and St Martin Emmaus, who collect larger items for free and give items a second chance of life! Other

options include discounted or free disposal when you purchase a new furniture item. Sofa and kitchen appliance retailers often offer this service.

Find your collection day <https://collections.dover.gov.uk/property>

Tenancy Audits

Please note DDC Officers will be carrying out unannounced tenancy audit visits to check that the property is being occupied by the legitimate tenant. Because of the nature of the visits, Officers are unable to let tenants know when the visit will be carried out.

However, all Officers should have ID badges to show they are there for a legitimate purpose. If you are still unsure about letting an Officer into your property then please ask them to wait and contact Housing

Services on 01304 801084, option 8 for verification of their identity before allowing them access. During the visit you will be asked for official documentation to prove your identity, Officers will also

take a photo of tenant(s) for our records.

Christmas opening hours

We will be closed from 5pm on Friday 22nd December 2023 and will reopen on Tuesday 2nd January 2024.

Bin collection arrangements.

There will be no collections on Monday 25th December or Tuesday 26th December 2023 therefore collections from Monday 25th December 2023 to Friday 5th January 2024 will change as below:

Monday 25th December to Wednesday 27th December

Tuesday 26th December to Thursday 28th December

Wednesday 27th December to Friday 29th December

Thursday 28th December to Saturday 30th December

Friday 29th December to Monday 1st January

Monday 1st January to Tuesday 2nd January

Tuesday 2nd January to Wednesday 3rd January

Wednesday 3rd January to Thursday 4th January

Thursday 4th January to Friday 5th January

Friday 5th January to Saturday 6th January

You can still contact us by email, or our online forms and we will receive them on 2nd January. We can be contacted for emergencies on our phone lines during this time.

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 waste and recycling.



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](mailto: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'.