



TENANT NEWS

Edition 8
Summer
2024



Roarsome summer fun!

See what we've been up to



What's in the magazine

- Have your say and win prizes in the new Tenant Survey
- See how our 'Housing Community Days' went
- Join the Dover District Tenants' Consultative Group
- News and information about your Housing service

Welcome

Welcome to the summer 2024 edition of the tenant newsletter - it's been an important year for DDC as a Registered Provider of Social Housing. There have been changes to the way that social housing is regulated as a result of the Social Housing Regulation Act coming into force from 1st April 2024.

These changes are designed to protect tenants and improve the service you receive. Under the new standards landlords such as DDC, need to:

- Ensure tenants are safe in their homes
- Listen to tenants' complaints and respond promptly to put things right
- Be accountable to tenants and treat them with fairness and respect
- Know more about the condition of every home and the needs of the people who live in them
- Collect and use data effectively across a range of areas, including repairs.

Tenant Survey

Following last year's success, we are offering another £350 prize draw to residents across the district who complete our Tenant Survey.

As part of the Regulator for Social Housing's national 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' (TSM), we must complete an annual perception survey with our residents which is designed to check how all social landlords are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

The results will be compiled by the Regulator nationally to check that we are performing as we should.

The results of this survey are very important to DDC as they help to show areas where we are performing well and areas where

we can improve. To see last year's results see page 11.

A paper copy of the 2024 survey is included with this newsletter, but you can also complete this online at www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewsletterSurvey24.



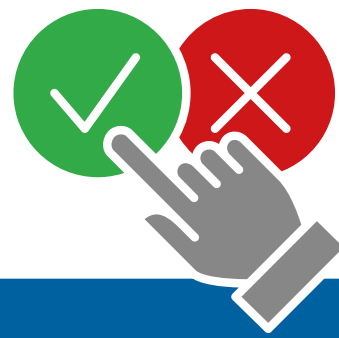
How you can contact us

- Email housing@dover.gov.uk or call us on **01304 801 084** about Housing Management enquires only.
- Household and communal repairs: email Mears at repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk or call **0800 023 4320**.
- Gas, hot water and central heating repairs: Email Gas Call Services at DDCcustomerservices@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 801 110**. Alternatively, you can email housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk for repairs/permissions or

housingplannedmaintenance@dover.gov.uk for planned works.

If you'd like to make a complaint or share your compliments about any of the housing services you receive, you can do so through any of our contact methods. We're dedicated to making it as easy as possible for you to tell us what you think so we can continue to improve our services by listening to you.

You said... We did!



At Dover District Council, we are committed to learning from any feedback we receive.

Complaint:

We found that after Officers were speaking with tenants face to face or over the phone, things could become confused, and in addition when staff are off sick or on holiday, the team weren't quickly able to pick up the tasks agreed with the tenant.

What happened:

We understand that miscommunication can happen and we want to limit opportunities for delays or misunderstandings and provide a smooth, accurate and timely service.

What we did and what we learned:

DDC have now improved the ways we record contact with tenants. Some of these improvements have been with our own internal systems, to centralise records onto one system.

However, as a resident you may have noticed that after a face

to face meeting, Officers have started to send you a quick email with a summary of things which have been discussed or agreed. This provides residents with a written record of actions and timescales, and ensures that all Officers at the Council have access to notes from any contact that other Officers have with residents.

Complaint:

Scaffolding erected to repair a roof caused disruption.

What happened:

The residents in a block of flats in the Dover District were disrupted when workmen arrived to erect scaffolding around the block for safe access to the roof to make much needed repairs. DDC and the scaffold company had taken consideration to keep the site secure and reduce risk of youths climbing on the scaffolding.

Tenants quickly complained that the scaffolders arrived at 8am and were making loud banging noises, disrupting tenants and impacting on the parking availability as parking spaces were needed to be used to anchor the scaffolding.

What we did:

After hearing tenants' dissatisfaction with the impact of the works, DDC sprang into action and immediately spoke to the contractor to see if their workmen could be more considerate when speaking to one another and moving about. Housing staff also spoke to parking services at DDC to arrange free use of a local council owned car park for all tenants impacted by the reduction in parking availability whilst the works were going ahead.

Whilst disruption to tenants and leaseholders is inevitable when major repair works are underway, we will always listen to tenants and endeavour, where possible, to create a smoother experience for all.

What we learned from this:

Whilst DDC informed residents of the roofing repairs due on the block, we understand that not enough consideration was made to making residents aware of the scaffolding which would be erected to enable the roofing repairs to take place. DDC will endeavour to take more consideration into the wider impact of repair works and keep residents better informed. We thank the residents affected for bringing this to our attention so we can improve services for all.



Your Money Matters

Pensioner Winter Fuel Payment goes means tested

What does that mean?

In previous years, all pensioners would receive a Winter Fuel Payment. However, from Winter 2024, the Winter Fuel Payment will only be paid to pensioners receiving specific benefits to ensure the funds are distributed to those on the lowest incomes with the greatest need.

Who is a pensioner and who will be affected?

For payments in Winter 2024, age eligibility will be those born before 23 September 1958.

What benefits qualify?

Pensioners must be in receipt of (or named as a partner on a claim for) one of the following benefits:

- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income Support

What if I do not presently get any of these benefits?

If you do not presently claim any of the above but want to see

if you may be entitled you can use a calculator such as www.entitledto.co.uk

Or you can speak to the Benefit and Money Advisors within the Income Recovery Team on 01304 801084 (option 1, option 3) to discuss what support may be available to you and for help with any applications. In some cases, you may be able to apply for the Warm Home Discount, or local schemes open up that may offer short term support with heating and energy costs – our Advisors can tell you more.

Are you claiming income-related ESA or ESA with housing benefit?

Changes you need to be aware of

The DWP has announced that it is planning to begin notifying Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants that they need to move to Universal Credit (UC) from September 2024, with the aim of notifying everyone affected to make the move by December 2025. It is important that you do not do anything until you receive your letter. This is called a Universal Credit Migration Notice and it tells you when you need to move to Universal Credit.

Look out for your letter as ignoring it could even stop your payments.

All of those receiving a letter will need to take action – migration is not automatic. The Income

Recovery Team wants your move to be as smooth as possible – there are two Benefit and Money Advisors within the team who welcome your questions and are

happy to advise. To contact the Income Recovery Team please call **01304 801 084** (option 1, option 3.)

Empowering residents and improving lives

Tenants' names have been changed to protect their identities but these are true stories of how we've helped DDC Tenants.

Roger lost his mum and couldn't manage a large property.

Roger sadly lost his mother in 2023. Roger had always lived with and cared for his mother and was able to succeed her tenancy upon her passing. However, the property was far too large and he was impacted by the Social Size criteria (bedroom tax.)

Roger was understandably upset and confused and was referred to Jennifer, Benefit and Money Adviser for support. Jennifer visited Roger and she helped him understand what benefits he could claim and what would change for him, and what bills he would now need to pay himself.

Whilst Roger was looking for a more suitably sized and affordable property, Jennifer helped him with his Universal Credit claim, and to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment to help with the bedroom tax to sustain his current property.

Roger also had health concerns of his own that he had not

addressed whilst focusing on caring for his mother. Jennifer helped Roger acknowledge and address his own needs and together they successfully applied for additional money within Universal Credit that acknowledged his difficulties, and also applied for Personal Independence Payment to aid him in better meeting his own needs.

Jennifer continued to provide telephone and face to face support to Roger as long as was needed and he successfully maintained his property and account until early 2024 when he was able to secure a more suitable property. This is more

affordable and meets his health needs.

The larger family home was then able to be relet to help relieve the pressure on family homes on the housing waiting list.

Roger and Jennifer kept in touch to ensure that the move went smoothly and ensure he knew what he needed to pay going forwards and how. Jennifer says, "I am pleased to see Roger now supported and settled and wish him well in his new home. I hope he knows he can approach me if anything changes for him in the future and that we are here to assist."

Lucy is a mum of a disabled child who has been difficult to contact.

DDC were finding Lucy hard to reach, she would not answer phone calls, voicemails, emails or letters from our rent team over a period of time. This made it difficult to discuss with her the small rent arrears that were building up on her rent account. We wanted to discuss this with her to come up with a payment plan and offer her any support in sustaining her tenancy.

Marie, Benefit and Money Adviser, discovered an anomaly on Lucy's Universal Credit award. Lucy has a disabled child who was in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, but it appeared Lucy might not be receiving the correct rate of Disabled Child Element within Universal Credit.

Marie was aware that Lucy was not engaging and possibly scared off by some of the negative terms that can be associated with rent collection, so she was careful to avoid



mention of rent/arrears and instead concentrated on her award/entitlement. Marie also struggled to contact Lucy to let her know of this anomaly over a period of time.

However, she persevered and rather than asking Lucy to

contact her, Marie instead empowered Lucy by providing her with information. Lucy has then used this information to challenge her award and successfully correct it.

Lucy received a back payment of £5000, and will have an increased income thanks to the diligence of Marie and the rent team. Lucy, called the rent team thanked Marie and Lucy is now better able to keep up her rent payments.

Join the Dover District Tenant's Consultative Group!

The Tenant Group has spaces and are looking for more residents to join them. The only thing you need is a passion for improving services.

Who are they?

Dover District Tenant's Consultative Group (DDTCG) are a group of DDC tenants who come together every 6 weeks from 11am-1pm (with the option to join in online) to discuss and find ways to resolve local issues and recommend improvements.

What have they achieved?

This year, the DDTCG have been instrumental in shaping the new Responsive Repairs Contract, helping the repairs team by adding in things that they



believe will be best use of money and what will benefit tenants. They will be playing a part in choosing the new contractor and ensuring the process is fair and with tenants at the heart.

They have also organised the Garden Competition and act as a judging panel. They lead on initiatives to improve our estates and celebrate tenants that work hard to maintain or improve

their area for the benefit of the community.

What's in it for you?

- Be part of something – play your part and feel proud of all the group's achievements
- Help improve the Housing Service for all tenants
- Never be out of pocket – DDC will reimburse for travel expenses and will provide refreshments at meetings
- Add to your CV – adding a string to your bow, learn new skills and set yourself apart if you're looking for work.

If you are interested in joining, please send Beth Becks an email at: beth.becks@dover.gov.uk or sign up on our website, just search 'DDTCG'.

Community Events

During August the DDC housing team has hosted 3 community engagement events to hear from residents in Aylesham, Dover and Deal.

These events were a fun opportunity to meet some of our Housing staff and partner agencies, while your children could have their faces painted for free!

DDC also frequently completes estate walkabouts, which gives you an opportunity to speak to your Housing Officer and raise issues with them in your community. If this sounds interesting to you, please check on our website for when we are doing a walkabout in your area.



Dinosaur Day

Dinosaur Day returned to Dover on Wednesday 7 August.

Thousands joined us in a fun day meeting Chomp the Gigantic T-Rex and his dinosaur friends, including dinosaur babies!

Other entertainment included

dinosaur art, dragon making, fossil excavation, hoola hooping and a family Dinosaur craft day at Dover Museum.

This event was part-funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund



Potential risks associated with household lithium batteries

Lithium batteries are commonly found in household items such as phones, e-cigarettes/vapes, e-scooters, tablets and most electric vehicles. When used safely they are completely harmless, just like any other battery. Here are some tips to help prevent your lithium batteries from becoming dangerous:

- Often fires originate from batteries overheating and igniting whilst being charged. Lithium-ion batteries should not be continually on charge or left overnight
- Always use the charger that came with your device. If you need to buy a replacement, choose a branded, genuine product from a supplier you can trust
- Don't cover chargers or devices whilst on charge as this may accelerate overheating
- Don't leave devices or mobility vehicles on charge blocking emergency exits or trailing leads
- Register lithium battery powered devices with the manufacturer / supplier to be made aware of product recalls. Electrical Safety First have created a useful product recall search section on their website
- Do not use batteries which have been subjected to physical damage, and that are swollen or deformed. These should be taken to your local recycling centre
- Don't leave your device in direct sunlight.



Kent Fire and Rescue Service are doing some research around rechargeable electrical items, like e-bikes, e-scooters, laptops and smartphones, that contain lithium-ion batteries. By taking 15 minutes to complete their questionnaire, you'll be playing an important role in helping to shape KFRS' work to prevent fires.

You can take part, here:
www.bit.ly/3YdDpET



Damp and mould

It is perfectly understandable that you may be worried about the health effects living with damp and mould may have for you and your family. It is very important to ensure you try to prevent this becoming an issue in your home, and report the issue if you do find damp and mould in your home.

The leading cause of damp and mould is condensation, which can be caused by water vapor being unable to escape and sitting on your walls for long periods of time. For more information about damp and mould please look on our website for tips to prevent condensation and report damp and mould if you find it in your home. www.dover.gov.uk/Housing/Damp-and-Mould/Damp.aspx.

Some tips if you have mould growth in your home:

Reducing Moisture

- Avoid drying your washing directly on a radiator.
- Always cover pans when cooking and do not leave the kettle boiling.

Ventilating and Prevention

- Open a window or turn on your extractor fan.
- Keep your property heated to at least 15 degrees Celsius at all times, for your health and comfort in addition to prevention of condensation.

Cleaning

- Clean mould off when you first spot mould spores appearing.



Making your home your own

Part of making your house your home is how you decorate it. Some people like bright colours or wallpaper, whilst others like a simple clean look of neutrals. However you like it is up to you, as decorating your home is your responsibility.

You can hire a professional decorator or handyman to do this, or you can have a go yourself. Here are some of our handiest tips to achieve the best possible finish:

1. Prep, prep, prep!

It is really important to prepare your surface before you start painting or wallpapering. You might need to wash the wall with sugar soap (especially if you've smoked indoors), you can fill any holes or nicks with filler, and you can smooth out lumps and bumps with sandpaper.

2. Cut in the edges

Before you start painting the walls, cut in the edges with a one or two-inch brush. This means first painting the areas that are

too tight for rollers, like the ceiling line, corners and trim. If you are nervous you'll make a mess, you can use masking tape or painters tape for a nice clean finish.

3. Use the right paint finish

The right paint finish for different surfaces and rooms is the key to a perfect result. For example, mid-sheen and gloss finishes reflect light, while special Bathroom and Kitchen branded paints offer moisture resistance and are easy to clean.

4. Cover your brushes and roller when you take a break

Is it taking a while to paint one area, or are you giving yourself a rest? To save yourself time and the hassle of washing brushes and rollers, just wrap them in cling film or an airtight container. Perfect for quickly getting back to where you left off or for your next coat.

5. Please be mindful of your neighbours when carrying out works to your home and do so within reasonable daytime hours



Super Dad in Guston!

We'd like to share with you the story of Wayne Ellerington of Guston. Wayne, his wife and daughter moved into their home 3 years ago via Mutual Exchange (whereby you take the property on in the condition it's left in by the tenant you swap with).

The previous tenant had left large amounts of rubbish in the garden including bags of rubbish and bulky items such as mattresses, furniture and even a kitchen sink!

Wayne had a lot to contend with but knew it had to be cleared so he spent lots of time and resources removing the rubbish, lovingly restoring the lawn and

creating a paradise for his family to enjoy. Wayne's wife entered him into the garden competition this year. Wayne said he didn't do the work to enter the competition, he did it for his family.



Cat Microchipping

Reminder of the Pet Policy

Living in a social tenancy there are certain rules regarding pets that you must follow.

You must acquire permission to keep a pet in a property without a garden. You can acquire permission retrospectively, which will be treated the same as any other request for permission. Permission must be requested whenever a new pet is to enter your household.

When assessing your home to grant you permission, the council will take into consideration:

- The type and size of your pets
- If the pet has, or is likely

to cause nuisance to your neighbours

- The type and size of your home
- The number of people living in your home
- Access to the road and open space
- Whether your home is a sheltered housing scheme.

Following new rules, all cats must be microchipped by the 10th of June 2024, before the cat reaches the age of 20 weeks. You

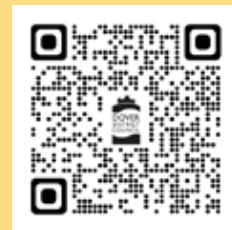
can be fined for not following these rules, but don't worry the council can help you cover the cost of chipping. Chipping your cat can be done for free with some charities, or for around £20 privately. Rescue cats from charities will usually come chipped as standard.



Is your dog microchipped?

It is a legal requirement to ensure your dog is microchipped and the details held with the microchipping database are kept up-to-date. Failure to do so is a **criminal offence**.

Scan the QR code or visit dover.gov.uk/dogmicrochipping
Call 01304 872239



Domestic Abuse

Our new Housing Policy

Dover District Council has a responsibility as a social housing provider to mitigate the effects of domestic abuse in our district, which is why we are currently in the process of creating a Domestic Abuse Policy for housing.

This policy will outline how we as a council safeguard domestic abuse survivors in our district, which upholds a consistent, transparent and accessible response.

Our policy recognises that domestic abuse can happen

to anyone. Our policy will be publicly accessible once it has been approved by cabinet. If you need help, or would like further information on support available to those impacted by domestic abuse, you can refer to the organisations listed on

our website: www.dover.gov.uk/Community/Community-Safety/Crime-safety-advice/Domestic-abuse.aspx



Moving Home

When you leave your current home, we ask you to please ensure that you leave it in good condition.

The council is responsible for your repairs, and will cover reasonable wear and tear caused by you living there. If you exceptionally or intentionally damage a property you will be accountable for this damage, and we can recharge



you. The cost to refurbish a property to be ready for someone else to move in is on average around £2,126, which increases to over £5,000 for a non-decent property.

Tenant Incentive Scheme

Are you currently in a home which no longer fits your needs? If you are now under occupying, or in a disabled adapted property which you no longer require, then please let us know! Under occupying a property could mean you are paying significantly more

in rent than you may be able to, for example if you are reliant on housing benefit to help with your rent, you have a top-up to pay.

To help you with removal costs, and any other costs you may incur through moving, we offer a

£500 upfront grant paid to you as soon as the tenancy to the new address has been signed. This amount, plus £1000 per room you have given up is paid upon moving.* For more information, please contact the Housing team.

**Conditions apply.*

Want to move?

Are you looking to move from your council home to another social housing tenancy? One option would be a mutual exchange with another tenant. Whatever your change of circumstance: moving for

work, downsizing, or just looking for a move from your old home, a mutual exchange could be a great option for you. There are no fees on HomeSwapper.

If you feel like a mutual exchange would be beneficial for you then please look at: www.homeswapper.co.uk for more information.

Tenancy Terminations - Process of what happens

If you are looking to end your Dover District Council tenancy, then the steps involved might be a little different depending on why you're ending your tenancy

with us, and where you are moving to. For more information please visit www.dover.gov.uk/Housing/Housing-for-Tenants/Resident-Information/Ending-

[your-tenancy.aspx](#). A journey map has been included below of the basic steps you will need to take.



Tenant Satisfaction measures

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Tenant Survey in 2023 for the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, here are the results of the survey last year.

Please consider taking the time to complete the survey for 2024, and we will let you know the results by publishing them after the survey has been closed.

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%

Tenant Satisfaction Measure	% of Tenants Satisfied
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%

Day in the Life of Our Housing Officers

Charn is our newest Housing Officer, working alongside other Housing Officers in the Housing Management Team. Charn's patch covers Dover Town, Buckland, Linces, Green Lane and the Canadian Estate.



"No two days are the same when you are a Housing Officer. My role includes visiting tenants, estate walkabouts, safeguarding, working with other departments to reduce antisocial behaviour, dealing with fly-tipping, ensuring gardens are well-maintained and that is just scratching the surface.

We try and have set admin days to catch up on emails and letters, but we could get called out to an incident at any moment.

Ultimately, our job is to support and sustain tenants in their homes and our days are dictated by their needs."

Charn is a ray of sunshine to the team, with her positivity she brightens the day of colleagues and tenants alike. Although still new, Charn has been a great asset to the team and has quickly built up a great rapport and trust with her Tenants.

Keep me Posted

Are you looking for a way to stay up to date with local issues? From local events, updates on your bin collection, information about public buildings like the Dover

Museum, to listings for Shared Ownership in the district, there's plenty on this free service which might interest you! To sign up to this emailing list, just search

'Keep Me Posted' on our website and sign up.



Repairs timescales, complaints process

Our priority is to fix emergency and urgent repairs, so it's important that you know the time frames we expect our repair contractors to work towards.

Our contractors, Mears and Gas Call Services, will respond to your repair requests within an agreed timeframe, detailed below.

If you have an issue in your home which needs to be fixed then there are timescales in place for how long the council has to help you, to ensure that you as our tenant are protected and safe.

- **Emergency repairs** - within 4 hours
- **Urgent repairs** - within 3 days
- **Routine repairs** - within 15 days

New Responsive Repairs Contract

As you might know, the current contract with Mears is coming to its end with no further extensions possible, so a new contract must be ready to start on 1 April 2025.

To achieve this, DDC have been working hard to prepare for the new contract to be agreed, and invited companies to bid. We have arranged for an intensive period of time to mobilise the new contract, to familiarise staff with the new procedures, to make sure the IT systems interface, inform you of any changes, and to test everything.

The Dover District Tenants' Consultative Group have been consulted with along each part of the process to ensure tenants' voices are heard and are able to help shape the contract. Tenants will also be part of the selection process.

Whilst this is a change to your housing service, we will do our utmost to make it as smooth and



easy as possible, keeping you informed along the way.

The timescale is set and a selection process will be carried out with a recommended decision for approval by DDC's Cabinet on 7th October. If all goes to plan, following the necessary standstill period and leaseholder consultation, we can then announce the successful contractor and start the Mobilisation Period.

Stock Condition Survey

We are about to start a Stock Condition Survey of all of our properties

This survey is a detailed inspection of the inside and outside of your home to gather information on any repairs and maintenance issues which should usually take about 30 minutes. We will then use

this information to plan our maintenance programmes for areas with the greatest need.

These surveys will take around 2 years to complete. We are working with a company called

MLCS3 and together we are putting together a programme of when and where the surveys will be carried out. Any appointments will be made by MLCS3 who will confirm this with you in writing.

Opting out of receiving this newsletter

Our printed Newsletters are free for tenants, but they are costly to produce. Whilst they are enjoyed by a range of our residents, we feel it's important to give you an opportunity to opt out of

receiving our Tenant Newsletters if it's something you'd rather not receive.

To opt out, please complete this short form online: www.surveymonkey.com/r/OptOutTenantNews

Or scan the QR code

