



SUMMER 2021

TENANT NEWS

**ANNUAL
REPORT
SPECIAL
EDITION**

Welcome
to our
second
edition
of tenant
news

What's in this issue:

- How to **contact us**
- See how we are **performing**
- Find out how you can **get involved**
- How we are **increasing** housing supply
- Making it easier to **exchange your home**
- **Asbestos** in your home
- How we are **keeping you safe**

INSIDE
Your Tenant
Satisfaction
Survey and how
to enter our
**£100 Prize
Draw!**



Nadeem Aziz, Chief Executive

Welcome

A message from Nadeem Aziz, Chief Executive and Cllr Derek Murphy, Housing Portfolio Holder

Welcome to this our second tenant newsletter since the housing service returned to the Council in October 2020. 2020/21 has been a difficult year and we want to thank you all for your patience and understanding and for helping us to help you and our staff stay safe.



Cllr Derek Murphy, Housing Portfolio Holder

Through a number of lockdowns and restrictions our teams have adapted to working at home and providing services differently and as safely as possible. Our priority has always been to make sure that even in these uncertain times you feel confident that we will be there if you need us.

We have a busy year ahead and as we start to develop our Tenant Involvement Strategy we will be looking at new ways to work with as many of you as possible to help us shape future services.

We hope you enjoy this, our second newsletter, and as always your feedback on this and our services is welcome.

How you can get in touch with us

There are a range of ways in which you can get in touch with us:

- **By letter** - Write to us at Housing Landlord Services, White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield, Dover, CT16 3PJ
- **By telephone** - Call us on 01304 821199. Lines are open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays). This line can also be used for out of hours emergencies.
- **By email** - For tenancy matters email housing@dover.gov.uk
If you've already reported your repair and want to speak to someone in DDC's repair team email housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk
- **In person** - Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, face to face appointments are only offered in necessary circumstances. Please call or email in the first instance. If you turn up unexpected at the Council Offices, staff will be unable to see you as most are working from home.

About us

On 1 October 2020 Dover District Council brought its housing management service in house for the first time in 9.5 years.



We own 4326 homes



1974 people are on our waiting list



502 homeless people helped

Between 1 October 2020 and 31 March 2021 we have been:



Making sure our staff have the equipment they need to work from home, in line with government guidance, enabling them to help tenants every day by phone, text and online.



Handled 18,024 telephone calls.



Had 56,735 visitors to our web site.

We have created 10 online forms so you can get in touch with us.

What happens if you aren't happy with our services?

We try to provide a right first time service to our tenants and leaseholders but we know that we don't always get things right and that sometimes our customers need to complain. To make sure we deal with the things that go wrong quickly and fairly we have a 2 stage complaints process.

Find our Feedback form in the 'Housing For Tenants' section of our website

74	19	21.5
Complaints received for the Property Team	Complaints for the Tenancy Team	Complaints received per 1,000 households

Please note, some of the complaints we have received have been inherited issues from EKH and we have been working hard to resolve those and improve the service for residents.

Get involved

Many of the ways that we have traditionally worked with tenants to improve our services have involved speaking to you face-to-face. This hasn't been possible for most of the year and many of the activities that we normally run have needed to be cancelled or taken place online. As soon as we can, we will restart popular activities that include going out and speaking to our tenants.

Ways you can be involved at the moment

- Take part in our surveys - We send surveys by post, text, email or telephone so we can find out what you think of our services.
- Comment on our policies – this year we will be reviewing our tenancy policy and our mobility scooter policy. Watch out for details.
- Join the Dover District Tenants Group – What do they do?
 - o Scrutinising the quarterly performance figures
 - o Agreeing environmental works to improve neighbourhoods
 - o Finding out how Dover's policies work and making sure Tenants' voices help shape them.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, our recent tenant meetings have been successfully delivered online using Microsoft Teams. If you are interested in joining sessions, we can offer training and support to help you engage online – just ask!



Sign Up for 'Housing For Tenants' on our Keep Me Posted for email updates on your landlord service. Visit DDC's website and

click on Keep Me Posted, when selecting topics, select 'Housing For Tenants' under 'Your Council'

Things we hope to re-start when we can

- **Estate inspections** – Look out for upcoming inspections, starting as soon as restrictions ease!
- **Community days**
- **Focus groups**
- **Sheltered Housing forum** - If you live in one of our sheltered housing schemes you can act as a representative to discuss the views and specific needs of tenants living at the scheme.

If you would like to get involved in any of these activities or would just like to find out more information, please email us on tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk

We need YOUR views! You can win £100 One4All Vouchers!

Complete our survey for a chance to win!

As you know, the housing service was managed by East Kent Housing in the 9.5 years leading up to 1 October 2020. Since then, the Council has taken the service back in house. We want to hear from you how satisfied you are with the services that our housing team have been providing in the last 7 months and the ways in which we can improve the service even more.

Please find a copy of the survey with this newsletter. To complete the survey with a chance to win the £100 vouchers, please visit www.dover.gov.uk and search 'Housing Survey' or find it under the 'Housing For Tenants' section. Or scan the qr code:



CLOSING DATE
20th August 2021

Moving home

Increasing housing supply

DDC have always worked with others to provide more affordable housing for residents in our district and this year for the first time in many years we have a building programme of our own.

Work is nearing completion on the William Muge/Snelgrove House site in Harold Street, Dover. We are excited to share photos of the progress and artistic impression of the finished development. With a total of 65 new homes built, they will be made up of 12 properties privately sold, 24 social housing rented properties and 29 properties will be shared ownership. We have also purchased a further 20 properties to add to our stock.



Mutual exchanges

A Mutual Exchange is a way you can move home by 'swapping' your property with someone else. You can swap with a Council home or Housing Association anywhere across the UK, you just have to make sure your circumstances meet the criteria for the property.

HomeSwapper is a popular way for our customers to find a suitable exchange. You can add photos and a description of your property and see what other properties are available.

You can find out more about HomeSwapper at: www.homeswapper.co.uk. To sign up, just select Dover District Council as your landlord and complete the easy to follow steps.



Sheltered housing

We'd like to thank all of our Tenants in our Sheltered Housing Schemes for their continued support and diligence throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our Sheltered Housing tenants have seen their service adapt and some schemes have had to have communal areas and facilities close to adhere to Covid-19 guidelines.

It's been a difficult time for lots of shielding tenants but we'd like to thank everyone for their cooperation in helping us deliver essential safety checks, inspections and maintenance during this time.

Our homes

How we've performed with lettings and waiting lists



Dover District Council own and manage 4326 homes.

90 homes have been relet.

502 homeless and potentially homeless households have approached the service and were helped.

86 households mutually exchanged their homes.

12 properties were sold under Right To Buy (43 RTB applications).

We're sorry! Changes to waste and recycling collections across the district

Statement from our contractors Veolia:

"From 12 April, Dover residents may have experienced a change in collection day and/or week, following a major service change to the collection service. We expect there to be a temporary period of adjustment while our crews and residents get used to using the new service. With all of our recycling and waste collection crews learning new routes and some getting used to new vehicles, residents may experience temporary delays or missed collections, which we apologise for and are working to rectify as soon as possible.

We are monitoring the ongoing performance of the service closely to ensure any issues that arise are resolved quickly and to this end we have deployed additional vehicles and resources.

We anticipate that the recycling and waste collection service will steadily improve and return to its usual high standard as soon as possible. If your bin is missed, please continue to leave it out as we will return to collect it as soon as we can. We are sorry for the inconvenience caused during this transition period and thank residents for bearing with us as we make this change to create a greener and more sustainable service."

Tenancy Management Policy

DDC are currently considering whether continuing to offer shorter term fixed term tenancies helps us achieve our ambitions for happy and resilient communities.

We know how important it is for families to feel settled and part of their community. Now that Housing is back 'in house' we have an opportunity to make changes that will promote stable and contented communities. Find out more about the changes we are thinking of making at the 'Housing For Tenants' part of our website or scan this QR Code.



My Neighbourhood

DDC take reports of ASB seriously and try to resolve issues of ASB as soon as possible. Once a report of ASB has been received the ASB Housing Officer will contact the complainant to gather as much information as possible and liaise with the police where they have also been involved. It will be explained to the complainant that diary sheets must be completed so that the ASB Officer can gauge the dates, times and duration of noise or nuisance behaviour.

The ASB Officer will then make contact with the alleged perpetrator to discuss the allegations made along with any information provided by the police or other agencies. In some cases the perpetrator may need support to be put in place to address their behaviour and to be able to maintain their tenancy. However, if the nuisance behaviour continues despite support being provided by the correct agency, then there are a range of options that DDC can take, providing there is sufficient evidence of the noise or nuisance behaviour.

Case Study

Earlier this year we dealt with the case of Ms Y, a tenant who lived in her first floor flat with her partner, Mr X. When we let her know that we were getting complaints about Mr X being noisy and intimidating from her neighbour she refused to believe us. Even when we gave her exact dates and times of incidents she wouldn't accept it and unfortunately because of the way Mr X behaved some of the other neighbours were too worried to come forward.

Ms Y and Mr X said one thing their neighbour said another. Both sets of neighbours started keeping records about each other and often called the police about each other.

To try to prove where noise is coming from we use sound recording equipment but when we installed this for the first time it didn't pick up anything. The housing officer persevered and on the second occasion it became very clear who was causing the problem. Ms Y was given notice that the Council would be taking her to Court for the nuisance her partner was causing but even then she refused to believe it. Although things quietened down for a short time it wasn't long before Mr X was causing more problems. Luckily these were caught on film from a mobile phone giving the Council enough evidence to get a Court injunction. Now Mr X isn't allowed within a metre of the block of flats and the tenant has a large bill for court costs to repay and her poor neighbours have had peace and quiet. If you are experiencing nuisance behaviour or ASB please contact us and we will try to help.

Cleaning up estates

Over the past 7 months we've been working hard to clean up estates. Here is a before and after photos of a clean up we organised in Elvington. We now have 2 estate assistants who travel the district inspecting and improving communal spaces. If you spot any areas in need of attention, please get in touch.



Before



After

Cleaning Services

Town and Country Cleaners are DDC's cleaning contractor. They are responsible for regular cleaning of blocks of flats, Sheltered Housing Schemes and void properties. If you have a concern about the standard of cleaning in your block please let us know.



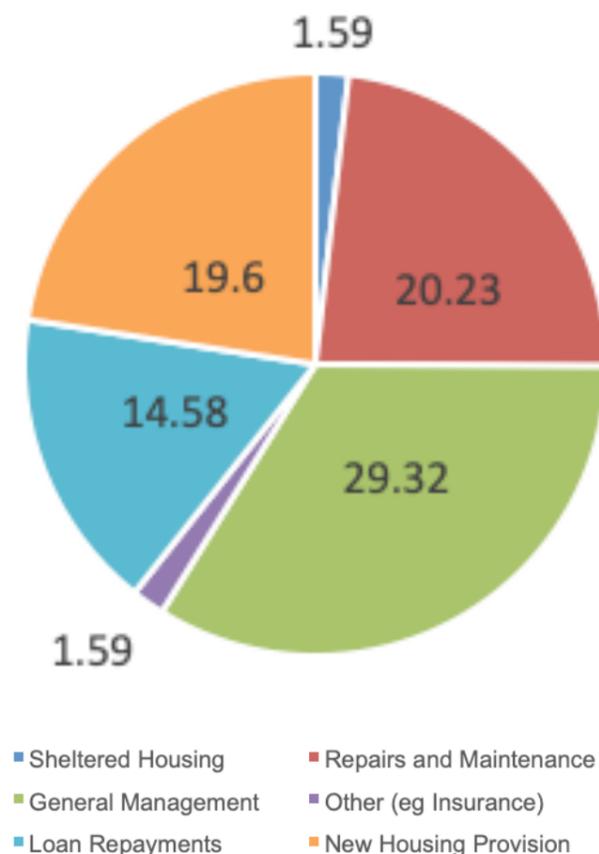
Rents and Value for Money

How we set our rents

Social rents are set using a government formula. This creates a 'formula rent' for each property, which is calculated based on the relative value of the property, the size of the property and relative local income levels. Affordable rent is no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

How do we spend the money we collect

How an average Weekly Rent of £86.91 is spent



Income collection How we are doing

281
cases worked on by our
Money & Benefits Officer

£19,726,337
amount of rent
collectable

3.79%
of rent arrears from total

Struggling to manage?

If you are struggling to manage your money and falling behind with your rent please let us know. We are here to help and can put you in touch with other organisations that specialize in these types of situation.

Citizens Advice - www.citizensadvice.org.uk
The StepChange Debt Charity offer solutions via its online debt counselling service Debt Remedy.
The National Debtline offer free, independent advice. Call them on 0808 808 4000 or speak to them online via their website's webchat www.nationaldebtline.org
Kent Savers - call them 0333 321 9050 (Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm) or 0300 456 9990 from 5pm to 8pm, and weekends from 8am to 8pm
Money Advice Service - moneyadviceservice.org.uk or call 0300 500 5000
Loansharks Advice - visit www.direct.gov.uk/stoploansharks

Repairs and Major works

Our repairs service is carried out in partnership with our contractors. We have a landlord's duty to carry out certain repairs and maintenance works in order to keep our properties in a safe condition and good working order.

Despite lockdown restrictions, a huge number of repairs were carried out between April 2020 and March 2021, here are the figures:



11051
Repairs raised

9472
Repairs completed

363
Repair orders cancelled

1216
Repairs on going

When the Pandemic struck in March 2020 our contractors were only able to deal with emergency repairs. We have slowly been catching up with all of the less urgent repair reports and if you need to report a repair please get in touch with our contractors as usual.

If you have reported a repair but are unhappy with any delays or standard of work, please get in touch with our repairs team. You can email housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk or call us on 01304 821199 and select the option to speak to a member of the DDC Repairs team (option 3, then option 2 and then option 4).

Major works



74 New kitchens fitted

96 Bathrooms replaced

36 New pitched roofs and 4 new roofs to blocks (covering 85 flats)

12 Homes had new windows

12 Homes had new front doors fitted

361 homes had new Boilers installed

£3.2m
spent on planned maintenance work

Our planned maintenance team are working hard to increase the programme of works. This includes surveying property conditions, putting together schedules, tendering for and appointing contractors and keeping a close eye on works being carried out. We are actively reinvesting your rent money to improve homes across the district.

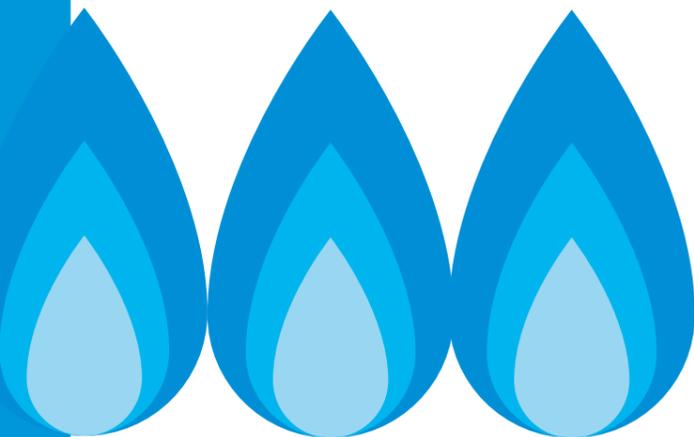
Safe and secure homes

Spotlight on gas safety

As your landlord, DDC is legally required to have the gas system in your home serviced and checked each year. These checks are designed to keep you safe. We realise that many of you may have been asked to shield during the pandemic and might be worried about letting workmen into your home. To help make sure this important work is dealt please:

- Let us know if anyone in your household is affected by Covid-19 so that we can liaise with the contractor and make sure they take appropriate steps.
- If you have symptoms of Covid-19 and have an appointment for your gas service let the contractor know and they will rearrange your appointment.
- All of our gas engineers must wear appropriate PPE when they are in your property and wipe down surfaces when they finish. You can help by keeping windows open and moving to another room while they work.

If you are still concerned about having a contractor in your home let us know and we will do our best to reassure you and work with you to find a way for this work to still take place.



Asbestos

WHAT IS ASBESTOS AND WHAT IS THE RISK?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring material that was used in building materials in the UK between the 1950s-1990s. Any building built before the year 2000 may contain asbestos. Although asbestos is hazardous, it can only pose a risk to health if it is damaged or disturbed and the asbestos fibres are released into the air and then inhaled. This can happen through DIY work in your home such as drilling, sanding and sawing.

WHERE WOULD I FIND ASBESTOS IN MY HOME?

You cannot see asbestos fibres with the naked eye. We work with specialist contractors who can test and identify if asbestos containing materials are present. They may be present in various locations within a property, some examples include: Insulation boards between wall partitions, flooring (PVC tiles), textured coated ceilings and walls (such as Artex) and cement products.

Contact us if you want to carry out any DIY work to your property that might affect materials which contain asbestos. If you are not sure, we can arrange for a member of staff to advise you. Only a trained specialist contractor can remove the material. We will arrange any work to do this.

DID YOU KNOW?

If asbestos containing materials are in good condition and are unlikely to be disturbed or damaged then it is safer to leave them where they are.

If you think you have asbestos in your home and want advice, or are planning to decorate or do DIY, please email us housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk or call us on 01304 821199 and select the option to speak to a member of the DDC Repairs team (option 3, then option 2 and then option 4).

Safe and secure



As your landlord we want you to feel safe and secure in your home. This year we conducted:

99.98%

Properties have a valid Gas Safety Certificate

2,970

Properties have had an up to date electrical check

100%

Water systems tested and deemed safe. Asbestos surveys in communal areas. Fire risk assessments are up to date.

As the figures show communal safety checks have been easier to complete, we have had issues gaining access to a number of tenant's home during the pandemic. We want to assure all tenants that safety checks are extremely important and we work with tenants to ensure they are comfortable with workmen inside their homes and all PPE and cleanliness standards are strictly adhered to.

Safety in communal areas

DDC have 2 dedicated Estate Assistants who regularly inspect blocks and estates.

Do not leave anything outside your flat or in corridors. You must keep all communal areas clear. Items not only pose a fire risk, but they can also block access to the fire service and prevent your escape in an emergency.

Smoke severely reduces visibility and obstacles can cost lives.

Please remember that Mobility Scooters are classed as vehicles and are not permitted inside any communal area or flat. Not only is the flammable battery a fire risk, but the vehicle itself is an obstruction to fire escape routes.

If you have mobility issues, mobility equipment and electric wheelchairs can be sourced safely and correctly through an Occupational Therapist via your GP.



Adaptations

Aids and Adaptations

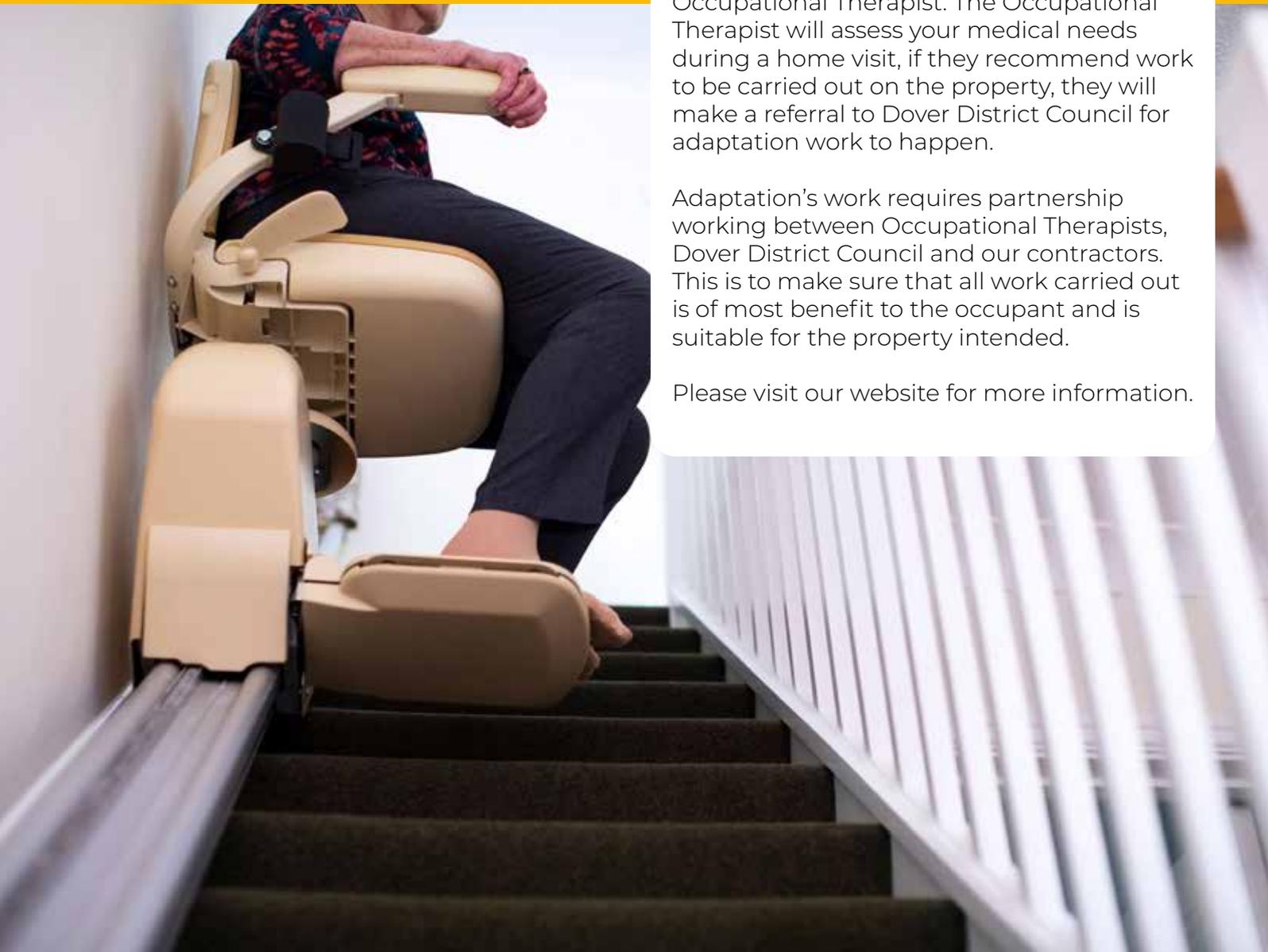
Dover District Council have an adaptations service that can provide qualifying tenants certain adaptations to help them remain independent in their home and enjoy a good quality of life.

How you get a disabled adaptation

If you feel like yourself or an occupier of your property needs an adaptation, you can approach your GP to be referred to an Occupational Therapist. The Occupational Therapist will assess your medical needs during a home visit, if they recommend work to be carried out on the property, they will make a referral to Dover District Council for adaptation work to happen.

Adaptation's work requires partnership working between Occupational Therapists, Dover District Council and our contractors. This is to make sure that all work carried out is of most benefit to the occupant and is suitable for the property intended.

Please visit our website for more information.



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