



TENANT NEWS

Edition 4
Summer
2022

ANNUAL REPORT SPECIAL



Estate Walkabouts
Come along and meet your team



What's in the magazine

- How you can maximise your income
- See how we're performing
- See what the Dover District Tenant Group are up to
- Day in the life of a Housing Surveyor
- How we're increasing housing supply
- Have your say about our new strategies

Welcome

Welcome to our summer newsletter for 2022. 2021/22 has been a year full of challenges, hard work and improvements all round.

We hope that you have started to notice the improvements we have been making.

In the last year we've increased our housing stock by building and buying properties, reduced rent arrears, supported hundreds of you to apply for the benefits and financial support you're entitled to and boosted our planned maintenance programme by spending £3.97m on improvements to your homes. These achievements and others that you will read about in this newsletter are just some of the

ways in which we continue to improve the housing service.

This year we will be updating our Tenant Engagement Strategy and would like to hear what you think of our proposed priorities and involvement opportunities. We hope that our newsletters help to keep you up to date with the work we are doing, but remember you can also join our 'Keep me posted' service where you can receive email updates or any of our other involvement activities, see page 13.



Nadeem Aziz
Chief Executive



Cllr Derek Murphy
Housing Portfolio Holder

About Us

 WE OWN **4369** HOMES **UP FROM 4326** LAST YEAR

 **1773** people are on our waiting list **DOWN FROM 1974** LAST YEAR

 **502** homeless people were helped in 2021/22

Between 1 October 2021 - 31 March 2022 we have:

- Handled **13,561** calls from November on our new phone numbers 
- Had **89,065** visitors to our web site (up from 56,735 last year) 
- We have 10 Online forms and you have submitted 118 forms in total. 

How to get in touch with us - There are a range of ways in which you can get in touch



By letter

write to us at Housing Landlord Services, White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield, Dover, CT16 3PJ



By telephone

Call us on 01304 801084 for housing management enquires and 01304 801110 for property enquiries such as repairs and permissions. 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
- If you have a problem or query over grounds maintenance you can email: GMenquiries@dover.gov.uk
- If you have a problem or query over trees you can email: tree.enquiries@dover.gov.uk
- 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



In person

We are happy to meet you face to face, however please ensure that you book appointments in advance at your home or at the Council offices. If you turn up unexpectedly at the Council Offices, staff will be unable to see you as they are often busy, out and about on visits or are working from home.



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 things don't always go to plan and that sometimes our customers may want to complain. You can send us your complaints and compliments using our Feedback form in the 'Housing For Tenants' section of our website



Income & Benefit and Money Advice

It's been a difficult year for everyone, with belts getting tightened and all households under more financial pressure. We have been working hard to support tenants, including the most vulnerable to be able to make ends meet to pay their rent and keep roofs above heads, heating on and food on the table. Thank you for working with us. By working together we have been able to help you and reduce the amount of money owed in rent arrears.

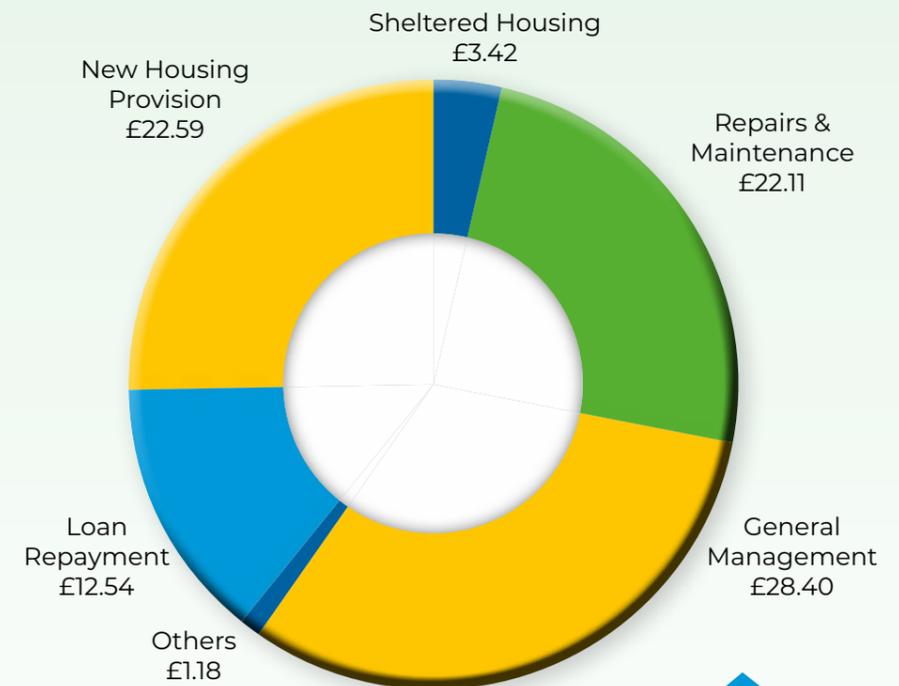
How are we doing?

 Our 2 Benefit and Money Advisors have helped **595** households.

 **£20,087,343** in collectable rent.

2.13% of rent is in arrears, compared to 3.79% last year.

How we spend your rent



Out of the average weekly rent of £90.24.

Where Can you get help?



MoneyHelper is a tool available to help you to make your money and pension choices clearer. It helps you cut through the jargon and complexity, explain what you need to do and how you can do it. It puts you in control with impartial guidance

that's backed by government and to recommend further, trusted support if you need it. For clear money help that's on your side and free to use, just search for MoneyHelper or type moneyhelper.org.uk

What are you missing?

- More than 7.1 million people are missing out on £15.1bn of benefits.

- Across all ages, 45% of people have never checked what benefits they are eligible for.

- 63% of pensioners admit having never checked and 1 in 3 are missing out on Pension Credits.

(turn2us, May 2021)



Entitledto is a benefits calculator, free for anyone to see what benefits they can go on to claim. By using our online benefits calculators, you can determine whether you are receiving the right amount of money in your

benefit claims, whether you are eligible for other types of benefits, as well as understand what your position will be as Government welfare reforms take effect. Just search entitledto or type entitledto.co.uk

Help with energy bills

Energy prices are continually on the rise and everyone will see increases in their bills, more increases are expected in October 2022, in addition to the ones we saw this April.

Whether you have a new tenancy, or have been settled some time, utility bills will always be a significant monthly outgoing. Regularly check that you are on the best tariff, getting the help you are entitled to and if you are struggling to pay, speak to your provider.

Debt: if you have a utility debt, speak to your provider – many have grant schemes to support with debt and will be happy to discuss repayment terms.

Friendly credit: You may already have had cause to use 'emergency credit' on your prepayment meter. But did you know that 'friendly credit' is also



available to ensure that your supply doesn't cease because top-up points are closed when your meter runs out? If your credit runs out after hours or on a Public Holiday you can still receive supply (remember emergency and friendly credit will need to be repaid when you top up.)

Priority services: If you have a health condition or age related

disability that makes you more vulnerable in the event of a power outage or break in supply make sure you have informed all of your utility providers. The priority services register enables your provider to keep you informed and provide you with support. If you have medication in the fridge, rely on a Lifeline Unit, have Oxygen or would have difficulties attending a community hub for supplies/support – let your provider know.



Our Benefit and Money Advisors

Jennifer Owen is one of our Benefit and Money Advisors and wanted to share a recent case she had to show you how the service can transform lives.

Peter was referred into the Benefit & Money Advice service by his Income Recovery Officer. A benefit review was carried out and it showed Peter was only in receipt of ESA and was missing out on help with housing costs, Council Tax support and potentially PIP

I called Peter and had a long discussion around missing entitlements and how if he claimed Universal Credit, he would be significantly better off.

I met with Peter and assisted him in making a Council Tax Support application, a PIP application and a UC claim, ensuring that his Support Group status was carried over from ESA to be applied to the 1st payment and that he receives more frequent payments (twice in a month) to help with budgeting.

All the applications were successful, and **Peter's annual**

income was increased by £9050.56 – Rent arrears have reduced from £950 to the point of being in credit and his housing costs are covered in full through UC.

When I met with Peter the property was challenging to navigate, there were signs of neglect and heavy clutter. For a person with health conditions, I could appreciate what a mountain this was to overcome – I sensitively broached it with him and he opened up and told me that when his spouse died, he could not find the motivation

nor capacity to deal with housework hence it becoming the way it was – I asked Peter for permission to refer him to Peabody's Home Straight service which he agreed to.

Peabody's have completely cleaned and cleared the property and garden, Peter is overjoyed at being able to enjoy his home again and is maintaining it well after the coaching provided by the Home Straight service."

(Tenant's name and some details changed for anonymity).

PIP = Personal independence payment to help with extra living costs if you have both: a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability,

Universal Credit = If you meet criteria, it is a payment to help with your living costs. It's paid monthly.

ESA = Employment and Support allowance gives you money to help with living costs if you're unable to work.

TOP TIP

Do you know you can pay your tv licence in easy to manage installments via their simple payment plan? Visit their website for a full list of concessions and see if you're eligible at www.tvlicensing.co.uk

TOP TIP

Grab a pen and paper and write down all your outgoings over a month or a week. Include everything from bills to luxuries like tv subscriptions, takeaways and treats. Is there anything, however small, that you could cut down on?

TOP TIP

Ensure you have registered the utility accounts in your name to qualify for reductions and discounts that may be applicable. Take and report meter readings regularly to ensure you're paying for what you use.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, get in touch and our Benefit and Money Advisors will try to help you. Please contact 01304 801084 or email housingrents@DOVER.GOV.UK

A day in the life of..

Meet Mark Read, one of our Housing Maintenance Surveyors and find out more about what he and his team do for the housing service.

What do you do in a typical workday?

My job is so varied, I could be in a rural village looking at trees and parking, and then off to a visit in Deal to inspect work carried out by a contractor and then back to the office to draw up plans and catch up with emails and admin. I have a balance of inspections and visiting our properties, and work at my desk, such as correspondence, getting

quotes for jobs, raising orders and keeping track of spreadsheets.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

I love to be able to make a difference to people's lives by improving where they live. It's great to get involved in projects like improving parking, resurfacing paths and communal areas to make our tenants' day easier. I also enjoy working on



the kitchen contract and seeing our tenants overjoyed with their brand-new kitchens.

How are YOU doing?

What have we been doing in the last year?

64
Kitchens replaced

108
Bathrooms replaced

148
Homes had windows replaced

68
Number of front or back doors replaced

18 houses and **5** blocks totalling **45** flats roofs replaced

£3,965,000 spent on planned work in total.

£382,000 spent on disabled adaptations, of which

63 involved major works including 30 flush floor showers, 4 over bath showers, 1 through floor lift and various other works including ramps, internal alterations etc. 16 stairlifts were installed and there were 173 minor works installations involving grab rails, minor paving and access works etc.

Increasing Supply

We've been working hard to develop new affordable homes across the district, by building them ourselves or working with developers in the area.

One of these recent projects has been at Jute Fields in Deal. DDC has taken ownership of six homes, two two-bedroom semi-detached homes for shared ownership, also two two-bedroom and two three-bedroom semi-detached properties for affordable rent.



DDC Cabinet Member Cllr Derek Murphy joined DDC representatives to welcome families as they moved into their new homes.



Pledge to become a smoke free home

We're supporting KCC and the NHS's initiative to encourage residents to pledge to protect themselves and their children from the dangers of second-hand smoke in the home.

Tips include setting a date for when your house will become smoke free. Hold a family meeting to ask everyone for support and if you or your visitors really can't give up smoking go out into the open air and smoke

but make sure it is away from any of the spaces you share with your neighbours and not in any of the internal communal areas if you live in a block of flats.

We're giving away free packs which include information about

how you can start your smoke free journey and lots of goodies such as a tea towel, coaster, magnets, stickers etc. Ask us if we come and visit or pick one up from reception at the DDC Offices.



Aspire Project

This innovative holistic project provides FREE beginner friendly workshops and support for anyone over 18 who wants to improve their health and wellbeing and their employment opportunities, and to feel more confident and positive about life.

A wide range of fully supported activities includes cooking, gardening, beekeeping, wellbeing and exercise sessions, accredited courses, employment support, mentoring, volunteer opportunities, work experience, NHS One You weight loss and healthy lifestyle support and more.

For more information on ASPIRE:

Website: Dover.gov.uk/Community/ASPIRE/

Contact: ASPIRE@bechange.org.uk

Summer is here!

Estate walkabouts

We visit each estate once a year for a planned walkabout where we invite tenants, leaseholders, Councillors and any other interested person to come along and join us.

We sometimes do a litter pick whilst we're there and we always wear our high vis waistcoats so you know who we are and you can come and say 'hi!'. Here's

some of our team at a walkabout in Eastry earlier this year where we also picked up lots of litter on the estate.



To find out when your walkabout is, scan this QR code or search 'Estate Walkabouts' on our website.

Looking after your garden

If you're fortunate to have a garden we hope you get a chance to enjoy it over the summer. We love to see tenants look after and enjoy their gardens by growing fruits and vegetables, planting flower beds and maintaining a lovely lawn.

There are lots of free hints and tips to help you maintain your garden on the tv and online.

If you're having trouble maintaining your garden, please speak to us. We may be able to put you in touch with people that can help or you might want to consider moving to a home with a more manageable garden or no garden.

Here are some things to consider:

- You are responsible for keeping your garden neat and tidy. Please do not store indoor furniture, appliances etc outside.
- You must not put up a greenhouse, garage or shed

near the property without our written permission.

- If you want to build a fish pond or water feature in your garden you will need our written permission.

Please note that you may have to remove these

when you end your tenancy at

- your own expense (we will charge you if we have to do it).
- Please do not plant large types of tree in your garden, their roots can damage the structure



of your home. You must not allow any hedge to grow more than two metres high or overhang pavements or your neighbours' gardens.

Do you have a communal garden or outside space?

We encourage everyone to enjoy green spaces around our estates and buildings.

If you bring children's toys outside, please ensure they are stored and not left outside overnight. All paddling pools must be emptied over night as it is a safety risk.

Please consider your neighbours and try to ensure that you are not impacting their ability to enjoy their home by keeping the noise down, not restricting access or creating obstacles and being kind and courteous.

Asset Management

Here are some examples of new kitchens and bathrooms we've replaced recently, we replace them on a cyclical planned programme and also on empty properties when needed to ensure that the property is fit for purpose for the new tenant.

If you'd like to find out if your home is due a new kitchen, bathroom, roof or other planned work, please take a look at our programme on the website.



11032

Number of repairs completed on time



11684

Number of routine repairs completed in the year



98.02

% of appointments kept



34.62

Average number of days taken to complete routine repairs

Before...

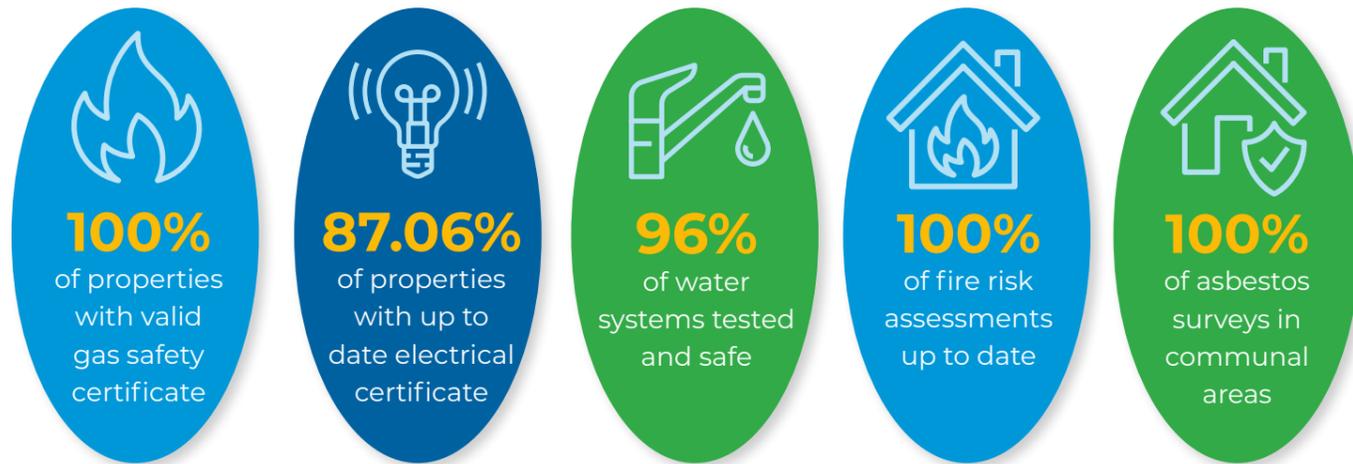


...After

Safe and secure

We take the safety of our tenants and leaseholders extremely seriously and work tirelessly to get 100% of our properties tested and safe.

Here's how we've done this year:



We are very proud that our safety record has improved year on year, and we strive to continue to gain access to all our properties to improve further.

Remember to lock your doors and ensure that communal doors are not kept unlocked or held open.

Please let us in

We understand that strangers entering your home can cause anxiety for some of our residents, we will only ask to enter your property if it is truly necessary.

Examples include:

- Carry out an inspection
- Carry out a gas safety check
- Carry out an electrical safety check
- Carry out repairs or

improvements that may be necessary

- Inspect a neighbouring property
- Discuss any issues relating to your tenancy.

Your tenancy agreement states that you must allow

Council employees and/or our contractors to enter the property at reasonable hours on request for the purposes of inspecting the property or carrying out any works.

Aids and Adaptations

We work closely with tenants, occupational therapists, and Kent County Council to adapt homes to suit the needs of our residents. Here are some examples of two projects we have completed.

If your life would be improved with some adaptations, please speak to your GP who can refer you to Kent County Council to get started. Alternatively, you can go to adult social services directly.



Your Neighbourhood

We're relaunching our Environmental Improvement Programme!

Do you have an idea for a project?

Ideas must be physical projects that benefit a local area and tenants:

- Improve safety
- improve the accessibility to an area
- improve the appearance of an area
- improve cleanliness/tidiness of an area
- improve the use of an area
- contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents

Previous ideas have been new signage, improved bin stores or drying areas, new parking bays, anti-parking bollards to protect grass or new paths, hard standing or tarmac.

For full details, search for 'EIP' on the DDC website.



Submit your ideas using the QR code, or type www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/EIPideas

Improving neighbourhoods

Any problems or queries with Grounds maintenance?

Contact GMenquiries@dover.gov.uk or if it is to do with trees, please email Tree.enquiries@dover.gov.uk

Remember, if the tree or hedge is in your own garden then this is your responsibility to maintain as stated in your tenancy agreement.

Polite reminder

Please ensure your children do not play games in the communal hallways and entrances, this can cause a nuisance to your neighbours and ball games can cause damage to the building.

Neighbourhood strategy

Neighbourhood management is a general term used to describe the work that the housing service does to manage Council housing estates. It includes tenancy management and estate management.

We want all our tenants and leaseholders to enjoy their homes in a decent, safe and secure living environment and recognise what an important role effective neighbourhood management has in helping us achieve this.



Our draft Neighbourhood Management Policy covers a wide range of activities including how we will manage the shared communal areas on estates, provide services and the standard

of these. The policy also explains the role you play in helping to improve where you live by meeting the responsibilities you have under the terms of your tenancy agreement. This can be

by not storing items in communal spaces, keeping your gardens tidy and disposing of your rubbish properly.

We are currently consulting on the content of the policy and welcome your views.



Full details can be found here

Anti-social Behaviour

Sadly, dealing with anti-social behaviour has become an increasingly bigger problem for the housing management service. We understand that living in close proximity with others sometimes leads to nuisance, annoyance, harassment and very occasionally even violence. We work closely with the police, community safety and other agencies to manage and respond to cases and deal with these problems.

Between April 2021 and March 2022 we had:

188
ASB cases reported

175
ASB cases closed

Case study

Complaints about Mr A, one of our tenants, were received from his neighbours alleging that he had visitors coming and going at all hours causing a disturbance and that possibly he and his visitors were using the property to deal in drugs.

Two neighbours agreed to submit diary sheets showing details of the times and dates of the visitors.

The ASB officer worked closely with the police and after a

period of time, the courts granted the police a warrant for a drugs raid. A substantial amount of drugs, money and phones were found during the raid and Mr A was advised that due to the serious breach of his tenancy conditions, if he was found guilty in court then housing services would take tenancy enforcement action for possession of his home.

Mr A was convicted in court of possessing drugs with an 'intent to supply' and a notice of seeking possession was served on him.

Mr A ended his tenancy with Dover District Council and handed back the keys. This helped to improve the lives of the residents that had been reporting ongoing problems caused by Mr A and also saved Dover District Council money for an expensive court case.

Our Assistant Housing Officers and Housing Officers work tirelessly visiting estates, undertaking inspections, litter picks and visiting residents. If you see them on your estate or area, please stop them and say hello.

You can get involved

Share your views with us and help improve our services.

The Regulator of Social Housing encourages all social housing landlords to give their tenants a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the formulation of housing related policies, decisions about how housing services are delivered, and help monitor how they are performing.

Every three years the landlord should consult with its tenants and leaseholders about the opportunities they have to be involved and whether they feel these offer them the chance to make a difference to the housing service.

Since the housing service came back in house in October 2020 we have been working with tenants in a number of ways to make sure that they have the chance to tell us what they think of our services. We've used this information to put together a plan for the next

few years that we hope will build upon the work we've already started and give a wider group of people of all ages and from all backgrounds the chance to work with us.

We've worked with a tenant focus group and the Dover District Tenant Group and they've said that we should have the following 4 priorities



Breaking down the barriers



Rebuilding the trust



Increased offering and a larger variety of opportunities



Supporting tenants to be involved

We've been talking to a wide range of tenants and they have said that they would like to be involved in the following ways. We've arranged their suggestions in order of the amount of time you would need to commit to each activity:

Very low time commitment

ONE WAY COMMUNICATION

keeping you informed. Publications such as **email** updates, **newsletters** and up to date **website** information.

Low time commitment

ONLINE INVOLVEMENT

Hearing from you from your own home. Send us **surveys**, complete forms and **consult** with us.

Moderate time commitment

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Get involved from your community. Litter picks, community events, competitions and targeted consultations in major planned work.

Largest time commitment

FORMAL MEETINGS

Come along either virtually or in person to our more formal meetings such as **Dover District Tenants' Group** and **Focus Groups**.



We would like to hear what you think about the suggested priorities and ways that you can be involved and in particular any other ideas that you might have to encourage tenants to be more involved.

Dover District Tenant Group

The DDTG are a local group of Dover District Council tenants and leaseholders.



The DDTG are 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, however work closely with DDC to resolve issues and recommend improvements to the service.



Neil Drakley was elected as the new Chairperson for 2022, we thought you might like to know more about Neil so we've asked him some questions:

What's your favourite thing about being chair?

My favourite thing about being the chair is that I can see the impact I can have in ensuring that tenants have a voice in influencing how the council sees and acts towards its tenants.

What does your role as chairperson involve?

My role as chairperson involves attending the tenants group meetings and working with the Secretary to keep a control of

the meetings, working from an agenda and seeing that everyone has the opportunity to have their say. I check the minutes before the secretary distributes them to the members.

What are you looking forward to working on this year?

This year we as a group are working to ensure that all tenants are heard and have been working on a strategy to improve communications between tenants and the housing department and its contractors which has shown some grey areas and vice versa.

And finally, are you accepting new members?

Yes we are! We have vacancies and would welcome more members. You're welcome to come along to one of our meetings to see what we do and if you like it, you can become a member. All we ask is that you are a tenant in good standing and follow our code of conduct and terms of reference.

Contact Beth Becks on tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk to come along to a meeting if you're interested.

Focus Groups

Would you like to help? Are you a budding journalist, community champion or just want to see things done well?

Focus groups are a small group of tenants brought together for a short number of meetings with housing staff to achieve a set outcome or goal.

Our repairs contract is up for renewal in 2025 and we want to bring together a group of residents to help us appoint a new contractor. Keep an eye out

for opportunities to be involved in this exciting project.

What's in it for you?

- Help make a difference and improve the housing service.
- Get to know your Landlord better.
- Easy commitment - you only need to commit to a short number of sessions.

- Add it to your CV - use and prove your skills in listening, finding problems and coming up with solutions.

To find out more information and join, please contact us at tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk.

Housing Ombudsman Service

Do you know about the Housing Ombudsman Service?

As a resident of social housing you have a right to use the Housing Ombudsman Service if you are unhappy with the way in which we have handled your complaint.

They offer a free complaint resolution service and have recently been given a more important role in housing. You can also contact them for general advice about housing complaints and your rights when complaining. Their

website has data and reports on complaints in social housing and can be found at <https://www.housingombudsman.org.uk/> You can call them on 0300 111 3000 Monday to Friday, 9.15am to 5.15pm or email info@housingombudsman.org.uk

TOP TIP

Come to us if you have a problem with repairs. Going to a 'no win no fee' service that promises to deal with disrepair means you lengthen the process and even if successful, you might only get a small payment once the company have taken their share for legal fees. Talk to us in the first instance and follow our complaints procedure, we will try to sort the problem out and if you are still unhappy you can speak to the Housing Ombudsman.



Coming up!

See what we have planned to help us continually improve the services you receive.

Prize draw

In 2021 we did a tenant satisfaction survey and held a £100 prize draw to find out what you thought of the service and what improvements we could make.

We received lots of entries and a tenant from Kingsdown won the £100 prize of 'love to shop' vouchers.

We have another survey due to take place next summer so we

can hear your views again and see how we've done over the following 2 years.

Here are some ideas for prizes, do you have any others?

- £100 in vouchers?

- Annual membership to Wingham Wildlife park?

- Entry to our awesome local castles with English Heritage?

Send your ideas to us on tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk

Repairs contract

The repairs contract, currently with Mears, is up for renewal in 2025, that might seem like a long way away but lots of work and preparation is currently going into writing the specifications and documents.

We want to hear from you about what you think about our repairs.

Please let us know if you want to be involved in the contract renewal. We are putting together

a focus group who will work with us to do this work and when the time comes, we want them to sit in the interviews and be actively involved in the process.

Contact tenant.involvement@dover.gov.uk to register your interest.

Planned maintenance programme for 2022/23 is now LIVE!

Find out if your property is listed on the planned programmes for this year by checking our website. Just search 'planned maintenance programme'.

We will be regularly updating the website with the programme and information around the process. We will also be creating some

booklets to help you know what to expect when you have major works done to your property.



Use this QR code to view the programme