All the information you need about your tenancy with Medway Council

Tenants’ welcome pack
How to contact us

Below you will find a list of useful numbers for council services.

**Housing repairs**
For urgent or non-urgent repairs during normal working hours:
- Phone: **01634 333601** (option 2)
- Freephone: **0800 0730073**
- Email: housingrepairs@medway.gov.uk

For emergency repairs outside of normal working hours phone: **01634 304400**

**Gas**
If you experience a problem with your boiler or gas fire phone: **01634 733499** (option 1)

**Housing Officer Duty Line**
To talk to a housing officer during normal working hours about your rent or any tenancy related matter phone: **01634 333344**

**Welfare Reform Team:**
For welfare and money advice:
Freephone: **0800 4088080**

**Housing Benefit/Council Tax:**
Phone: **01634 332222**
Email: ctax@medway.gov.uk

**Housing Services**
You can also access information on Housing Services at [www.medway.gov.uk/housing](http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing)

**Medway Council Housing Services**
[MedwayCouncilHousing @MCounciltenants](https://twitter.com)

**General council enquiries:**
Phone: **01634 333333**
Email: info@medway.gov.uk

**Bulky waste collection:**
If you have a large unwanted item such as a sofa, fridge-freezer or mattress that you would like to dispose of, book online at [www.medway.gov.uk/bulkywaste](http://www.medway.gov.uk/bulkywaste) or phone **01634 333333**.

Contents

4. Welcome
6. Moving in
9. Your tenancy
16. Repairs and maintenance
38. Estate services
40. Money advice
43. Your community
49. Moving on
53. Comments, complaints and suggestions
Welcome
About us

Welcome to Medway Council Housing Services. We are the landlord to Medway Council tenants and leaseholders. We manage your tenancies and homes in partnership with Mears, our repairs and maintenance contractor, and Norse, our caretaking and cleaning contractor.

This tenant handbook will provide you with a quick start up guide to moving into and living in your home, and it is something to refer to throughout your tenancy so that you know how to access the services we provide. It also outlines our expectations of you as a tenant, maximising the opportunity for you to carry on living in your home.

What we do

We provide a number of services to your home and the land around your home that we have responsibility for maintaining, which you will find out more about throughout this handbook.

• We collect your rent and service charges and use this to pay for all of the services below.
• We will undertake repairs which we are responsible for in a timely fashion. Some repairs are your responsibility. You may be charged for some repairs if you have damaged the property.
• We will make sure your home is safe to live in by servicing your boiler annually and the electrics at least every ten years.
• We provide an emergency repairs service outside of the usual working office hours.
• We make sure that communal areas are clean and tidy and repairs are undertaken when needed by completing planned estate inspections.
• We make sure that green areas that we own around your home are tidy.
• We own and manage a number of Homes for Independent Living Schemes which are for residents aged 60 and over.
• We respond to reports that you make about anti-social behaviour in your community.
• We survey properties and plan in larger and more expensive works that are our responsibility such as replacing kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and roofs.
• We may undertake adaptations to your home if you are assessed as requiring adaptations by an Occupational Therapist.

• We can help if you are experiencing problems with debt and make referrals for support.
• We provide a service to our leaseholders. These are residents that have either bought their flat, or are living in a flat that has been bought from the council.
• We manage and let garages that we own.

Where you can find us

• Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, ME4 4TR

Usually we will visit you in your home however if you would like to visit us, then contact your housing officer to arrange a convenient appointment.

• Mears, 8 The Courtyard, Campus Way, Gillingham Business Park, Gillingham, ME8 0NZ

A resident’s resource centre is based at Mears and hosts a variety of training courses and has internet access. Courses will be advertised online and in our tenant magazine Housing Matters.
Moving in
What do I need to do?

There are a number of things you need to continue to do when you live in your Medway Council home such as pay your rent, however the below are those you need to do right away:

Getting in

We will give you three sets of keys for each of the locks in your new home when you sign your new tenancy. If you want any extra keys, you will have to arrange and pay for this yourself.

If your home is fitted with any shared key fob systems for example for shared entrance doors, you will need to buy extra fobs from us.

Energy supply to your home

Make a note of your gas and electric meter readings. You would have been shown these at the viewing of the property.

Phone 0800 0730300 to find out who provides energy to your home. If you want to compare prices you can do this online at www.medwayswitchandsave.com

To change supplier you must contact the current supplier to notify them, and contact the new supplier to set up an account.

Phone Mears on 01634 733499 to turn on and test the gas supply to your boiler so you can have access to heating and hot water.

Your new home will come with access points for your electric or gas cooker, however these will have been capped off and you will need to arrange and pay to have your electric or gas cooker connected to these. It is against the law for anyone other than a qualified electrician or Gas Safe engineer to carry out these connections for you.

Income and expenditure

Complete your income and expenditure form so our specialised officers can see how we can help you to maximise your income and manage your finances.

Changing your address

You should notify:

- Medway Council Housing Revenues and Benefits Service to update your council tax and housing benefits records;
- the companies that supply your water, gas and electricity. Take your own meter reading in case of any later disputes;
- the company that supplies your telephone service;
- TV licensing to transfer your TV license;
- health services such as your GP and dentist;
- your bank;
- if you have children, the schools that they attend;
- the Royal Mail to redirect mail to your new address. You can also do this online by accessing www.iammoving.com

New tenancy visit

We will visit you in your home, on a date that is suitable for you, within six weeks of you moving in. This is to make sure that you are satisfied with the condition of your new home and to make sure you are not experiencing problems with paying your rent or have any other tenancy issues.

Home contents insurance

We insure the structure of your home, however this does not include cover for your belongings, fixtures, fittings and alterations you may have at the property. We recommend that you get home contents insurance for your new home against accidental damage, theft, water leaks and so on.
Crystal Home Contents Insurance - Peace of mind at an affordable cost

10 Reasons to choose the Crystal Home Contents Insurance Scheme

1) No fuss, quick and easy to apply either through the post or over the telephone
2) No excess (you don’t pay the first part of the claim)
3) Covers theft, water damage and fire
4) Covers damage to internal decorations
5) Covers accidental damage to sanitary fixtures such as toilets and washbasins
6) Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible
7) Covers lost or stolen keys and freezer contents
8) You don’t need to have special door or window locks
9) All postcodes are included
10) Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options

Terms & conditions, exclusions & limits apply. A copy of the policy wording is available on request.

Ask your landlord for a free application pack or to apply for cover today, call Crystal Insurance on:

0345 450 7286
(you can request a member of the crystal team to call you back!)

Email: crystal@thistleinsurance.co.uk  Visit: www.crystal-insurance.co.uk

Your tenancy
Types of tenancy

You may have one of several tenancies. Check your tenancy agreement for all of the conditions and which tenancy you have:

- **Introductory** – this is a 12 month trial given to all new tenants unless they had a secure or flexible tenancy with a social landlord immediately before taking on the new tenancy. We will review your tenancy over this period to make sure that you are not in breach of the terms of the tenancy. If we are not satisfied, then we may extend this period by a further six months and tell you why. If we refer you to court for not paying your rent or causing anti-social behaviour, the court will grant a possession order to the council.

- **Secure** – as a secure tenant you have more rights such as the ability to undertake a mutual exchange (swap homes with another social housing tenant). Contact your housing officer for more information or access our policies online at [www.medway.gov.uk/housing](http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing)

- **Flexible** – this tenancy is largely the same as a secure tenancy, but for a fixed term, usually for a period of five years (check this with your housing officer). Housing Services introduced flexible tenancies on 1 April 2014, with the aim of making best use of housing stock. They will only be granted to new tenants following the successful completion of the 12-month introductory term. The tenancy will then be reviewed at the end of the fixed period.

**Joint tenancies**

When two adults make an application for housing, we will usually offer a joint tenancy. Joint tenants are equally responsible for the tenancy and have the same rights. If one of the joint tenants breaks the tenancy agreement, we will take action against both tenants.

You should contact your housing officer if you need to make any changes to your tenancy.
What are my responsibilities?

Paying your rent

What happens if I don’t pay my rent?
As a tenant, it is your responsibility to pay your rent in full and on time. This is stated clearly in the tenancy agreement that you sign when you become a tenant.

If you do not keep up with your rent payments, it may lead to the council seeking possession of your home, and you will be pursued for the money you owe. This will also reduce your chances of securing alternative accommodation. At the earliest stage of experiencing financial difficulty, please contact us so we can try to help you keep your home.

When do I pay my rent?
From April 2016 rent will be charged weekly, 52 weeks of the year. Your rent is charged on a Monday and should be paid in advance according to how often you pay. For example if you pay weekly, your rent should be paid one week in advance.

How can I pay my rent?

- **Direct debit**
  Payments can be made by direct debit through your bank or building society on the 1st, 15th, 25th monthly, or on Friday weekly or fortnightly. Please contact the Housing Income Team on 01634 333344 for more details.

- **Allpay**
  Payment using your rent swipecard may be made at any Post Office or commercial outlet displaying the PayPoint sign. If paid by 5pm, the payment will be received by the council the following working day.

  Pay your rent by text message from your mobile phone. First register your details at www.allpayments.net/textpay and then each time you wish to pay your rent text PAY RENT $xx. xx plus the last four digits of your credit/debit card to 81025.

  Phone Allpay on 0844 5578321 and give your Allpay card number and credit/debit card details.

  Pay your rent using the Allpay app. Go to www.allpay.net/brandcentral

- **Online payments**
  Log on to www.medway.gov.uk to make online payments direct to Medway Council.

- **Phone**
  Payments can be made over the phone using a credit/debit card during office hours by phoning the Housing Income Team on 01634 333344.

- **By post**
  Cheques or postal orders should be made payable to Medway Council and should be sent to Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, ME4 4TR. Please write your name, address and tenancy reference number on the reverse.

- **Cash payments**
  Cash and cheques can be deposited at Chatham and Strood community hubs using the automated till. Please ensure that your name, address and tenancy reference is included.

- **Standing order**
  Please contact the Housing Income Team on 01634 333344 for information regarding setting up a standing order.

General information
If you have a query on your rent account, contact your housing officer for more information.
How can I get help with my rent?
You may be able to receive housing benefit to help you pay your rent. If you claim housing benefit, it is still your responsibility to ensure that your housing benefit pays for your rent.

How do I claim?
Claim forms can be obtained from the council’s Contact Points or by phoning Medway Council on 01634 332222 (Medway residents only) or alternatively by phoning 0800 0556688 or for people aged over 60 years 0800 991234.

If you are struggling with debt or your finances, do not ignore it.

Find out about debt support, universal credit and saving tips in the money advice section.

Allowing access to your property
We may sometimes need access to your home such as if you are not in and there is a leak from your property, or for our legal obligation to service your boiler on an annual basis. Failure to provide access for this service will result in Medway Council obtaining an access warrant for a forced entry to your home, at a cost that will be recharged to you.

Making changes to your property
You need written permission to make certain improvements in your home. If you would like to make your own improvements please contact your housing officer with details of the improvements you would like to make. Your housing officer will be able to advise if you need written permission for the works you propose.

All improvements or alterations by the resident will be their responsibility to maintain. The council reserves the right to recharge the resident for any damage caused to the property as a result of any work the resident undertakes.

Keeping a pet
You are not allowed to keep pets in your home without having written permission from your housing officer.

Residents must register each of their individual pets by using the form on the next page.

There are restrictions on the numbers and types of pets that you are allowed to keep, depending on your property type. You cannot keep a pet that is likely to be a danger or cause a nuisance to neighbours or visitors to the property.

For more information contact your housing officer or see our pets policy on www.medway.gov.uk/housing

Garden
If you have a garden, you must keep it neat and tidy by cutting the lawn, clearing the weeds, trimming the hedges and maintaining trees. You must not store or keep any bulky or unsightly items in your garden. You must not use your garden for large items such as trailers, unless you have our permission in writing.
Animal Registration Form

If you wish to keep a pet in your property you must fill in and return the form below.

Should permission be granted, it would be pursuant to the terms and conditions of your tenancy agreement and Housing Services’ pet policy.

Tenant’s name:

Tenant’s address:

Postcode:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of pet(s)</th>
<th>Breed of pets</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Colour/s:</th>
<th>Owner’s name (If different from above):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Jack Russell</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black and white</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Gold fish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Joe Bloggs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please photocopy or cut out and complete this form and return this form to Medway Council Housing Services, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR
**Communal area**

If you live in a flat or maisonette, you should co-operate with your neighbours to keep the shared areas clean, tidy and clear of anything that may cause obstruction. If you leave things lying around that obstruct landings and stairs, they will be removed and you will be fined. You are also responsible for cleaning your landing or walkway area directly outside of the property. All walkways must be kept free of all items including pot plants. Washing must not be hung on balconies.

**Lodgers**

Secure tenants have a statutory right to take in lodgers. The Council requests that you notify us if you take in a lodger. Lodgers are licensees without any exclusive right to the use of the property and will be treated as members of the tenant’s family.

**Tenancy fraud**

If you don’t tell us that you’ve moved or ended your tenancy, you may end up owing outstanding rent. The council will pursue this and it will affect your chances of re-housing in future. By not using the property as your main residency you may be prosecuted for social housing fraud, which is a criminal offence. If you were claiming housing benefits during this time you will also be prosecuted for housing benefit fraud.

You can report fraud to the council anonymously to **01634 332233**.

**Subletting**

If you sublet the whole of your property to someone else, you will no longer be classed as a secure tenant and action will be taken to repossess the property.

**Anti social behaviour (ASB)**

ASB is any behaviour that causes harassment, alarm or distress and affects other people’s quality of life.

If you feel that you are a victim of ASB then you can report this directly to your housing officer by:

- **phone:** **01634 333344**
- **email:** **neighbourhoodhousingofficers@medway.gov.uk**

Reports of ASB can be made anonymously, however it does mean that we will not be able to make contact with the complainant. We encourage residents to give their contact details, as this helps to make the investigation process quicker and more effective.

If a crime is in progress or risk to life dial **999**, otherwise dial **101** which is Kent Police’s non-emergency number.

Other useful contacts are:

- Community Safety Team: **01634 333333**
- Citizens Advice Bureau: **01634 383765**
- Domestic Violence Helpline: **0808 2000247**
- Medway Domestic Abuse Team: **01634 792308**

**Fly-tipping**

Fly-tipping is ‘the illegal deposit of any waste onto land, or any waste dumped or tipped on a site with no licence to accept waste’. Report fly-tipping online at: **www.medway.gov.uk/flytipping**
Repairs and maintenance
What we look after

Medway Council works in partnership with Mears to deliver your repairs service. We must keep your home in good condition. We’re responsible for repairing and maintaining the structure and some items inside your home. We must keep gas fires, central heating systems, sanitation and supply of water, gas and electricity in good working order. We must also keep the shared areas in blocks of flats or maisonettes in good repair.

These are the most common items that we must keep in a good state of repair:
- the structure (walls and supports)
- fire bricks and fire backs
- the roof
- heating systems
- windows and glazing
- kitchen worktops and fittings
- external doors and glazing
- door frames and skirting boards
- chimneys
- tiles and other floor coverings (as originally fitted)
- window catches
- boundary fences and walls (excluding gates)
- external door locks
- essential access paths and steps
- pipes, taps and fittings
- drainage, gutters and external pipes
- water tanks and cylinders
- external decorations
- sinks
- cubbyholes and sheds we own
- basins
- stairway lighting, entryphone and shared TV aerials
- shared parts of blocks of flats (corridors, stairways, passages and accessways)
- toilet pans and cisterns
- baths or showers
- fire equipment
- wiring
- door closers
- switches, lighting and power points.

How to report a repair

You can report a repair using any of the details on the first page of this handbook.

In an emergency - out of hours service
Housing Services will respond to an emergency repair within either two hours or one working day depending on severity. To be classified as an emergency repair, there must be a significant risk to health and safety, a risk to buildings, or a risk that other properties will be damaged, for example a total loss of electric power or risk of flood.

The types of repairs considered to be an emergency are:
- total loss of electric power;
- unsafe, broken or missing electrical fittings (not simply defective);
- total loss of gas supply;
- a gas leak on the property side of the meter;
- a blocked, damaged or defective flue to an open fire or gas appliance;
- total loss of space heating or water heating (between 1 November and 31 March only);
- a blocked toilet pan (When property has one toilet only or if one toilet and disabled tenant/resident) and/or there is blocked soil stack or blocked foul drain in danger of potential backsurge.
- a leak from a water supply pipe, heating pipe, tank or cistern;
- boarding up of a broken window or door;
- loss of heating or hot water.

If you have an emergency repair outside office hours that requires urgent attention please phone our out-of-hours emergency repairs hotline on 01634 304400.

Please remember that this is an emergency call out service, not a repair service. We will attend within two hours to make sure that no one is in any danger, but will not necessarily complete the repair at that point of time. A follow up visit may need to be arranged by the contractor in order to complete the repair.

Urgent repair
We will respond to urgent repairs within three or seven working days depending on the type of repair. An urgent repair is where your comfort is substantially affected or delay may cause the building to deteriorate - for example rotten timber flooring, a loose handrail or minor leak.

Non-urgent repair
Housing Services will respond to non-urgent repairs, which do not severely affect your comfort, in 20 working days - for example to repair a fence.
The right to repair scheme

Some repairs are covered by the right to repair scheme. This means that by law we must carry out certain small, urgent repairs quickly and at no cost to you. Qualifying repairs are likely to affect your health, safety or security. A qualifying repair must not cost more than £250.

When you report a repair we will inform you if it is a qualifying right to repair. In some cases we may need to inspect the repair to make sure it qualifies under the scheme. If it does, we will give you a repair notice. This will say how long it should take us to carry out the work. If the work is not completed within this time, you have the right to ask that we use a different contractor. We will then give the second contractor the same period of time to carry out the repair as the original contractor.

If the second contractor does not carry out the repair within that timescale, we will pay you compensation of £10, plus £2 for every day the repair is not done after the end of the second timescale, up to a maximum of £50. However, we may offset this compensation to pay off any money you may owe us.

Sometimes there may be a good reason why a repair cannot be carried out on time, for example, if you do not keep your appointment with the contractor. If this is the case we will not pay compensation.

Your responsibilities

You have a duty to take reasonable care of your home. If you don’t, you may have to pay for any damage.

These are the main things that you must keep in good condition and repair or replace as necessary:

- keys;
- roller blinds and curtain rails;
- sink, bath and basin plugs and chains, choked internal pipes and traps and tap washers;
- floor coverings, including laminate floorings;
- window and door furniture;
- all decorations inside your home;
- minor repairs to kitchen units;
- minor cracks in plaster;
- electrical plugs and fuses and fittings for all appliances;
- dustbins;
- light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, fuses and wired fuses to fuse boxes;
- clothes lines or rotary dryers (unless we have provided them in a shared drying area);
- internal glazing;
- gates and gardens.

Medway Council is not responsible for damage to decoration caused by leaks from other properties (unless Medway Council or its contractors are negligent in causing this). You may be able to recover costs from either your home contents insurance or that of the person that caused the damage.
## Recharges

If you, a member of your household, or a visitor damages the property meaning it needs to be repaired by Medway Council, you may be liable for the costs of these works, plus an admin fee (£15 if the cost of works are under £100 or 10% of the costs if over £100) plus VAT.

Where possible we will advise if the repair is rechargeable when you first report it to us and advise of an estimated cost. However if you do not advise us the repair is required due to the action of you, your household or visitor, but this is identified when the workman attends, you will still be charged for these works.

You may also be responsible for costs faced by Medway Council or neighbouring tenants if your actions or those of your household or visitors cause damage to neighbouring properties. For example a leak caused by you or your facilities causes damage to another tenant’s property.

## Pest Control

If you have pests (rats, mice, fleas etc.) in your home it is your responsibility to get rid of them. For more information or to book Medway Council Pest Control go to [www.medway.gov.uk/pestcontrol](http://www.medway.gov.uk/pestcontrol) or phone 01634 333333.

## Gas servicing

We are responsible for carrying out a yearly safety check on the gas appliances belonging to us in our properties.

When the gas safety check is due you will be sent a letter with an appointment time. If this is not convenient then you should contact Mears to arrange an alternative time. If you are not in at the arranged time, the engineer will leave a card, asking you to make contact and arrange another visit. A further letter will be sent for you to make immediate contact if we do not hear from you.

If we still hear nothing a formal final notice will be issued warning that legal action may be taken to access your home. If we are required to force entry to your home to carry out the gas servicing, we will charge you the cost of gaining entry.

## Gas leaks

If you smell gas, phone Transco immediately on 0800 111999. In the meantime you should:

- turn off the gas at the meter
- open windows and doors to increase ventilation
- put out any naked flames
- do not turn any electrical switches or sockets on or off.
Your handy guide to repairs

This section contains an easy-to-follow guide explaining some of the common parts in your home. So, if you need a repair, you can give us accurate information about what it is and where it is, helping us to give you a fast and efficient housing maintenance service.

Shutting off your water supply

At times you may need to turn off your stopcock. You should know where your stopcock is. It is wise to test it twice a year. You can do this by shutting it off to check it closes, then opening it fully. Then close it slightly by turning it back towards off.

Some items, such as a toilet cistern, have their own isolation valves, so the water supply to this item can be turned off without it affecting anything else in the property.

If this is not the case, you may be able to turn the supply off at gate valves on the pipes coming from the cold water tanks.

Leaks

Before you phone us:
• If the water is collecting near electrical fittings, turn off the electricity at the mains.
• If you’ve shut off your water supply, remember that you may have to turn off your central heating system and immersion heater.

What we need to know when you phone us:
• If you have a leak, can you see where the water is coming from and which item of equipment is affected?
• Is it the cold or hot water supply?
• How serious is the leak?
• Are your electrics affected?
### Toilet

Sometimes a cistern will overflow. If it does, you may take temporary action. This is described on the page dealing with **overflows**.

There can be a problem with the **cistern**, causing it not to fill up. If you lift the **lid**, you may be able to see if this is the case.

A leak can happen on the flush pipe, or the joint between it and the pan (the cone joint).

A toilet that will not empty when flushed is possibly blocked in the **pan outlet**.

### Running overflow

**Before you phone us:**
- You can take temporary action while waiting for your toilet overflow to be repaired. You can tie the float in the up position, as shown in the diagram. This closes the ball valve and will shut off the water supply to the cistern.
- Turn off the cold-water supply at the stopcock.

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- Which overflow is causing the problem, for example, the toilet, the cold-water tank and so on?
- Where does the overflow run out, for example, outside?
- Is the overflow running continuously?
The toilet will not flush

Before you phone us:
• Has the water authority said that the water is going to be turned off?
• Lift the lid on the cistern to see if the flushing arm has become detached from the syphon.

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Is it the only toilet in your home?
• Is the cistern filling properly?
• Is the cold water supply running?
• Are there any broken parts inside the cistern?

The toilet is leaking

Before you phone us:
• Try to prevent the leak from causing more damage.
• Turn off the cold water supply at the stopcock.

What we need to know when you call us:
• How serious is the leak?
• Is the pan cracked or are any pipes or joints leaking?
• Does the toilet only leak when it is flushed?

Faulty tap

Traditional pillar tap
The tap head (1) or handle (also known as a lever handle) might be loose, or perhaps the retaining screw (2) is missing.

Sometimes a tap will not turn off properly because of a worn washer (3).

A tap can also be loose at the base (4).

Various problems can occur with taps (for example a slow drip which shows that a new washer may be needed).

Before you phone us:
• Find the stopcock as you may need to turn the water off.

What we need to know when you call us:
• What type of tap is it?
• Where is the tap, for example, in the bath, sink, wash basin?
• What is the exact problem, for example, a loose handle, dripping tap and so on?
### Blocked sink

To clean a trap, unscrew the relevant sections and clean them out. Before unscrewing them, you should make sure that both taps are turned off and you put a bucket or a bowl underneath to catch water. When replacing the cap, make sure it is tightly fitted.

### Damaged sink or basin

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- Is it your kitchen sink or bathroom wash basin that is damaged?
- What is the problem, for example, a blockage, leak or crack?
- If the leak is on a supply pipe, is it the hot or cold one?
- If the sink is blocked, what type of trap is it?
- Have you tried to clear it yourself?
- How did the damage happen?

### Baths

**Before you phone us:**
- Check where the leak is coming from, for example, the overflow, waste pipe or supply pipes.
- Check the sealant between the bath and splashback tiles as water can seep through here.

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- If there is a leak, what pipe is it on?
- If the leak is on the supply pipe, is it the hot one or the cold one?
- If there is a problem with an overflow pipe, where does it empty out?
- If the splashback tiles are broken, how many tiles are affected?
- Has the leak caused any damage in your home?

Damaged sealant between the bath and the splashback tiles will need attention to prevent water seeping through.

Leaks will be noticeable from the: **overflow** if the bath is overfilled; **waste pipe** when the bath is emptied; or **supply pipes** (at all times).
Miniature circuit breakers (MCBs)
Switch off automatically if there is a fault on the circuit.

Before you phone us:
• Check if your neighbours’ homes are affected. If so, phone your local electricity company. You’ll find the number in the phone book under electricity.
• Find your mains electric switch. In most properties it includes an automatic switch-off device called a residual current circuit breaker (RCCB). This is a large switch marked ‘ON/OFF’. The RCCB switches off automatically if a situation creates a possible shock or fire risk.

If the RCCB has switched off automatically, you should do the following:
• Switch off all miniature circuit breakers (MCBs). These are smaller switches marked ON/OFF.
• Return the large RCCB switch to the ‘on’ position.
• Switch on each MCB in turn until the RCCB automatically switches off.
• Switch off and unplug any appliance connected to that particular circuit - they are usually labelled. In this way, you can find the faulty appliance.

If the RCCB or MCB switch does not return to the ‘on’ position, there could be a fault in your circuit. You should report this to us.

Electric fittings
Please remember to take care with electrical equipment and fittings. You should report problems such as flickering lights and overheating sockets without delay.

Before you phone us:
• Make sure a fuse hasn’t blown or a circuit breaker hasn’t switched off.
• Make sure the problem isn’t an obvious one, for example, a new bulb or broken light fitting.
• Make sure the plug sockets are working.

What we need to know when you phone us:
• What the problem is.
• Does the problem just affect one room? If so, which?
• Were you using a particular appliance at the time of the power failure? If so, have you checked the plug fuse or is the appliance faulty?

Power sockets
Before you phone us:
• Check it isn’t your appliance that’s faulty by plugging it into another socket.
• Make sure a fuse hasn’t blown or a circuit breaker hasn’t switched off.

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Were you using a particular appliance at the time of the power failure? If so, have you checked the plug fuse or is the appliance faulty?
Lighting

Fluorescent lights normally last a long time. If they flicker when you turn them on, it could be because the starter switch is faulty.

Water heaters

What we need to know when you phone us:

- What type of heating system do you have?
- Do you have hot water at any time, or not at all?
- Is the water cylinder hot, even when hot water is not coming through the taps?
- Do you have other ways of heating water in your home?
- Do you have water supply problems?

There will often be a temperature control switch (1) at the top of the immersion rod, or a cylinder thermostat (2) might be fixed to the outside of the cylinder.

If an immersion heater is fitted, there will be a nearby power switch and perhaps a timer.

It is common for homes to have a hot-water cylinder. Water may be heated by an immersion rod (3).

It is also common for hot water to be fed to the cylinder from a boiler that is independent of, or part of, a central-heating system.

You may have other types of heater in your home, such as a gas-fired instantaneous water heater.
Heating systems

The radiator does not heat up

If radiators are not heating up, it might be because air is trapped in them and you should try to bleed them. This is easily done with a radiator key. The heating needs to be switched off & the pump not running, or else it will pull more air into the system. Make sure you don’t open the valve any more than is necessary to let air out. When the hissing noise stops and the water appears, the radiator is free of air and you should close the valve tightly.

Before you phone us:
• Try bleeding the radiator, as shown in the diagram.
• Make sure the radiator valve is turned on fully.

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Have you tried to bleed the radiator?

Faulty boiler

Before you phone us:
• Check to see if the power is still on.
• Has the pilot light gone out?
• Is the boiler thermostat set high enough?
• Is the room thermostat set high enough?

What we need to know when you phone us:
• What type of heating system do you have?
• What type of fuel does the system use?
• Does your heating system also provide the hot water? If so, are you without both services?
• Have you checked the thermostat, timer or fuses?
• Do you have any other ways of heating your house or getting hot water?
• Are there any people living with you who are ill or very young or very old?

Storage heater

Before you phone us:
• Make sure the socket is turned on.
• Are the heating controls high enough?

What we need to know when you phone us:
• What is wrong?
• Which heater is it?
• What make and model is it?
• Are there any other problems with your electricity supply?
**The door is jammed or sticking**

*What we need to know when you phone us:*
- Which door is affected?
- Have you a security system?
- If the door will not close properly, has it been recently painted, or does it show signs of warping (bending)?
- Is there any damage to the frame, locks or door furniture?
- If a glazed panel is broken, what type of glass is it and how was it broken?
- What type of door is it?
- Are you unable to get into your home?
- Have you had any new carpets fitted recently?

**The glass in the door is broken**

*What we need to know when you phone us:*
- Which door is it?
- How was it broken?
- Is your home no longer secure?
- What type of glazing is it, for example, single or double?
- What type of glass is it, for example, clear or patterned?
- What is the door made of?
What we need to know when you phone us:
- Which lock is affected and is there a second lock to the door?
- What type of lock is it?
- Has the door been forced open?
- If the lock needs refixing, what is the door made of, for example, wood or plastic?
- Do you have a security problem?

The striking plate should be fixed to the door frame. (see door diagram)

If the lock is sticking, you might try lightly oiling it through the keyhole.

If you have lost or broken your key, we may be able to gain entry and change part of the lock.
Broken window pane

What we need to know when you phone us:
- Is the window single or double glazed?
- Is it clear or patterned glass?
- How did the damage happen?
- If you don’t know who broke your window, please get a police crime report number before you report the breakage to the repairs’ hotline.

The window frame is jammed or sticking

What we need to know when you phone us:
- What type of window is it and what is it made of, for example, plastic, wood or metal?
- Which floor is it on and which room is it in?
- Are there any apparent problems, for example, loose or missing putty, rot in the frame and so on?
- If you have difficulty closing a window, has it recently been painted, or does it show signs of warping (bending)?
Roofs, Drains and wastepipes

Tiles or slates are missing

Before you phone us:
- If there is water leaking into your house which could affect the electrics, switch off the power at the mains.

What we need to know when you phone us:
- How many storeys does your home have, including any loft?
- Can you see where the slates or tiles are missing. If so, how many are missing?
- Is water coming in through the ceiling? If so, which rooms are affected and is it happening all the time?

Damage to a flat roof

Before you phone us:
- If there is water leaking into your house which could affect the electrics, switch off the power at the mains.

What we need to know when you phone us:
- What part of the roof is damaged?
- What type of roof covering is it?
- What is the rough size of the damaged area?
- Is water coming into your home?

Chimneys

What we need to know when you phone us:
- Is the damage affecting the brick, chimney pot or leadwork?
- Is the chimney shared with next door?

Walls and ceilings

The two most common problems that happen with walls and ceilings are with damp and the plaster.

Damp

- Damp patches on ceilings may be caused by plumbing equipment leaking or rainwater getting into the house.
- Damp coming in from outside walls will only appear on external walls, often near windows or close to gutters on rainwater pipes.
- It is helpful to know whether the damp appears only when it rains or all the time.
- Rising damp is caused by water from the ground getting into damp proof courses.
- This sometimes causes floor tiles to lift and discoloured patches to appear on walls.
- Mould on walls can often just be wiped clean, but you should report it if it becomes serious.

Plaster

You should report a bulging ceiling immediately. There could be several causes of plaster flaking off walls or ceilings.

Usually, we will need to inspect the problem to find the cause and decide what action to take. Many buildings experience some minor movement, which can cause plaster cracks.

Try to be as specific as possible when describing these. You should report cracked or fallen plaster on outside walls, giving as much detail as possible. If you are reporting loose, broken or missing tiles, such as in bathrooms, tell us how many are damaged or missing.
**Gutters and rainwater pipes**

- A rainwater pipe may lead into a hopperhead, which can sometimes become blocked by leaves.
- The running outlet of a gutter can also become blocked by leaves.
- Each section of the gutter is supported by gutter brackets, which may be broken.
- Rainwater pipes can leak at seals and joints.
- Rainwater pipes are fastened to the wall by pipe clips, which can sometimes become broken.
- The shoe of the rainwater pipe helps rainwater flow into a gully, where leaves and other rubbish may cause blockages.

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- Is the gutter blocked? If so, can you see where?
- Do you know what material the damaged part is made of, for example, iron or plastic?
- Is there a leak on the gutter or rainwater pipe? If so, where is it, for example, on a joint?
- If the guttering is broken, how many sections are affected?

**Drains or wastepipes are blocked**

**Before you phone us:**
- Have you checked to see if you can clear the blockage yourself?

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- Where is the blockage?
- Is soiled water backing up in your toilet?
- Is there any damage to your home?
- Is there any flooding from an inspection chamber?

**Wastepipes are leaking**

**Before you phone us:**
- Try to prevent the leak from causing any more damage.

**What we need to know when you phone us:**
- Where is the leak and what is affected?
- How serious is it?
Stairs

Loose floorboard

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Where is it?
• What is the rough size of the area where the boards are loose?

Uneven stairs

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Is it inside your own home or are the stairs shared?
• What is the rough size of the area where the stairs are uneven?
• Are the stairs wood or concrete?

Broken or loose balusters

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Where is it?
• Is it inside your own home or are the stairs shared?
• What is the rough size of the area where the balusters are broken?

Kitchen Units

A cupboard is damaged

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Which unit is it?
• Which part is damaged?
• What is the size and colour of the unit?
• How did the damage happen?
• If the handles are broken, what type are they?

The sink unit is blocked

Before you phone us:
• Have you tried clearing the blockage yourself?

What we need to know when you phone us:
• What caused the blockage?

The sink unit is leaking

What we need to know when you phone us:
• Where is the leak?
• If it’s from a supply pipe, is it the hot-water or cold-water pipe?
How to maintain my home

Smoke alarms

You should test your smoke alarm once a week to ensure it is working. This is done pressing the test button on the outside of the casing.

The majority of Medway Council homes are fitted with a mains operated smoke alarm. Although they are mains powered, they contain a battery back-up to ensure they continue to work in case of an electrical power failure. If the alarm in your home emits an intermittent bleeping sound, this means the battery is in need of replacement. Please be advised that it is the tenant’s responsibility to replace the battery and in doing so, you should always first switch off the mains electric to remove any risk of electric shock.

If you find your smoke alarm is not working, you should contact the Mears Repairs Team urgently on 01634 333601 to make an appointment for the electrician to attend.

When decorating, you should temporarily cover your smoke alarms to prevent a build up of dust, which can cause false alarms.

Fire safety

It is important residents are aware of what to do in the event of a fire in your property or block.

If the fire is not in your home:
If you hear the fire alarm and the fire is not in your home it is usually safe to stay put. Be alert during this time and if heat or smoke begins to affect your home or you are instructed by a fire officer, close all the doors and leave the building immediately.

If the fire is in your home:
If you find a fire in your home raise the alarm by contacting the Fire Service by dialling 999/112, ensure all occupants leave, close all doors including the front door. Leave the building as quickly as possible by the safest route avoiding the location of the fire and go to a safe place.

If you are in the common parts and there is a fire:
Leave the building by the escape route and ring the Fire Service. Make your way to a safe place; stay there until the fire officer/member of staff informs you the building is safe to re-enter.

Phoning the Fire Service:
Dial 999/112 and ask for fire service, when you are answered give the address of the fire, do not hang up until the fire service have repeated the correct address back to you.

Fire cost lives and fire safety is taken very seriously. Be aware and take care of your own safety and the safety of others.

Note:
• No smoking is allowed in any of the communal areas.
• Do not overload plugs/sockets in your flat and take care when using multi-way adaptors.
• Keep cooker and heaters clear.
• Never use any faulty electrical items.
• Never leave hot appliances unattended when switched on.
• Do not place anything that will burn next to a heat source.
• Never leave candles unattended.
• Do not store materials, wedge doors open or block doorways in communal areas.
• Keep gas and electricity meter cupboards clear.
• Check and test your smoke detectors regularly.

Almost all fires in the home can be prevented. To make your home safer and to help reduce casualty and death from fire in the home, Kent Fire and Rescue Service can carry out free Home Fire Safety Checks and give home fire safety advice.

To book a free safety visit phone 0800 923 7000 (free from a landline) or email hsv@kentfire-uk.org with your name, address and contact phone number.

Carbon monoxide alarms

(CO alarm)

If your CO alarm sounds continuously, you should turn off any gas appliances you are using and switch the gas off at the meter (turning the handle a quarter turn). Then ring Mears Gas Team on 0800 0730300 (choose option 1).

If your CO alarm sounds intermittently, this could indicate that the alarm needs replacing. Please call Mears Gas Team on 0800 0730300 (choose option 1).
Condensation and how you can prevent it?

Condensation is arguably the most common form of dampness and can eventually lead to the growth of black mould. It forms on internal surfaces when the temperature drops sufficiently below the temperature of moist air inside the property. You should watch out for it because if left to develop, condensation can lead to damage to the property. More importantly, it can also aggravate or trigger health problems such as asthma.

What are the causes?

Day to day activities such as cooking, washing, bathing, ironing and even breathing all add to the problem. In a property of 4 people each will contribute approximately 4 pints of moisture per day, adding up to well over 100 pints per week! In the past there would be a natural escape for this hot, damp and poor quality air through window frames, doors, uncarpeted floorboards and so forth. However, building features designed to cut down heat loss such as cavity wall insulation, double glazing and draught proofing, inhibit ‘natural ventilation’. Instead, stale, humid air is trapped, commonly causing streaming windows, which will inevitably lead to musty smells, dampness and ultimately mould growth.

How do you spot it?

- Streaming windows and walls
- Damp areas can appear on walls, especially behind furniture and in corners
- Wallpaper can start to peel
- Blackened window frames
- Mould growth, usually black mould, starts to appear
- Soft furnishings and fabrics become prone to mould and mildew

Tips on how to reduce it...

- Try to keep the inside temperature reasonably constant for as much of the time as possible
- Avoid drying clothes indoors. If you have no choice, place the clothes rack beside an open window in a room with the door shut
- Do not dry clothes over any radiators
- Ensure any tumble drier is properly vented or the condensate regularly emptied
- Do not supplement your heating with paraffin/Calor gas type heating
- Keep furniture away from walls
- Do not disable any extraction units

Your home will be fitted with an appropriate heating system and appropriate ventilation such as extractor fans, vents, trickle vents, air vents and opening windows. It is a condition of your tenancy that these items are used to avoid build-up of condensation. If these items are not used and condensation issues occur as a result, you may be recharged for any remedial works that Medway Council needs to carry out.

Decorating

It is your responsibility to decorate your home.

Please read the section about asbestos on page 36 before carrying out any DIY or decorating in your home. If you think any of your decorating/DIY plans may disturb any asbestos containing materials you should seek advice from your housing officer before starting these works. Medway Council asks that you do not put polystyrene tiles up in your property.

Tips:
Preparing the area you want to paint

- After filling any cracks or small holes, ensure that you rub down the area, to create a smooth surface, before painting.

Types of paint you might use

(ensure each coat dries before you apply the next)

- Emulsion for walls
- Gloss or acrylic paint for woodwork (undercoat first where required).

Cleaning brushes

- Always clean brushes carefully and never flush excess paint down the sink or toilet.
What is the handyman service?

- The Handyman is a skilled person who has the tools and equipment needed to carry out works.
- The Handyman can help customers by carrying out small jobs around the home free of charge.
- The service will focus on any small jobs around the house that do not require immediate attention and fall outside of contracted repair works.
- Customers will need to provide materials for any job undertaken.

To qualify for the handyman service you must fall into the following criteria:

- Must have a clear rent account or be keeping to a repayment plan.
- No records of ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour).
- Have allowed us to carry out gas servicing and planned maintenance to your home without obstruction.
- Compliancy with your tenancy agreement.

The handyman will be able to:

- Put up shelves
- Adjust, renew or fix internal doors or gates
- Ease and adjust cupboard doors
- Small areas of painting, wallpapering and tiling
- Hang pictures, curtain rails, blinds and mirrors
- Assemble flat pack furniture
- Fix floor covering
- Fit or renew door bells
- Renew a toilet seat
- Complete minor gardening works
- Put up a washing line to existing posts or hooks
- Bleed radiators
- Fit wall brackets or hanging baskets
- Trim internal doors to fit new carpets or floor coverings
- Fit a plug or chain to bath, basin or sink
- Change light bulbs
- Remove or replace lampshades, curtains and pelmets

The handyman will not be able to complete any gas or electrical works.

How do I book the Handyman Service?

Please phone 0800 0730 300
Asbestos was widely used in construction in the UK from the 1940s until 1999, when its use was prohibited by law. Asbestos is still widely found in properties throughout the country but in the vast majority of cases poses no health risks at all. Asbestos is only a health risk in its fibrous form because it can become airborne. If it is inhaled it can cause serious health problems.

Considering the above, asbestos in your home is safe unless it is disturbed, damaged, or begins to break down with age and releases fibres into the air. If you believe this to be the case in your home, you should urgently contact the repairs team who will be able to advise.

Things to note:
- It is best to leave asbestos-containing products where they are if they are in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed.
- Try to make sure anything containing asbestos remains in good condition.
- Do not drill, saw, scrub or sand anything you think may contain asbestos.
- Asbestos is no longer used in construction or in goods such as toasters or hairdryers in this country. However, imported goods may still contain asbestos.
- There is no evidence to suggest that the use of asbestos cement in cold water tanks poses any risk of contaminating the water supply.

If you are planning home improvements and think you may have asbestos in your home, always talk to us first. We can check our records and tell you if any asbestos is present or arrange for our specialist contractors to carry out an asbestos survey.

If you want to find out more about asbestos, we recommend the following websites:
www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos
www.alsltd.com
Energy saving help and advice

Interested in making your home more efficient and cutting your energy bills?

With help and advice from the energy saving trust you could be entitled to a grant for:
• Cavity wall insulation
• Loft insulation and draught proofing

The energy saving trust can also offer advice on quick win changes to your way of living that will save you money.

• Ever wondered how much energy is used leaving the television on standby?
• Did you know energy saving light bulbs last 10 times longer than ordinary bulbs?

For free, independent and local energy saving advice please phone 0300 1231234 or visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk
Estate Services
Medway Council works in partnership with Norse to deliver your communal cleaning service.

If you pay a service charge which includes caretaking you will receive a service from the estate wardens who carry out a range of duties in communal areas including:
- cleaning areas where bins are stored;
- daily health and safety checks at larger sites and regular checks at smaller blocks;
- reporting communal repairs;
- cleaning of communal entrance areas, stairways and handrails (this does not include the landing or walkway area directly outside of the property);

If you live in a block of flats other duties may include:
- checking door entry systems and lighting and reporting any faults;
- checking rubbish chutes for blockages and bin areas for overflowing rubbish.

Helpdesk

The managed helpdesk service which operates 24/7, co-ordinates requests, orders, complaints and queries. You can contact the customer services operators by phone or email.

Phone: 0845 8500 319
Email: norse.helpdesk@ncsgroup.co.uk

When should I call the helpdesk?
The helpdesk should be the first port of call to:
- raise cleaning issues;
- log specific requests in regards to any services which Norse provide;
- record service/ staff compliments and complaints;
- ask questions regarding any service provision.

Estate inspections

An estate inspection is an inspection of the exterior and communal parts, facilities and grounds of a Medway Council housing estate or road that has 10 or more council properties on. We will be marking the estate on how well it has performed compared to our estate standard which can be found online at the link below.

Come along and join the inspection to tell us your views about your neighbourhood. To find out the dates and times of estate inspections then look on our website: www.medway.gov.uk/housing
Or phone your housing officer on 01634 333344.
Money advice
Who can help with debt advice?

If you have any concerns or would like advice on managing your money then you can contact these services:

**Housing Services Welfare Reform Team**
Our team can give you advice on dealing with debt and signpost you to other debt advice organisations. To speak to the team phone **01634 333344** or freephone **0800 408 8080**.

**Independent advice**
Free help and advice on dealing with your debt:
- National Debtline **0808 808 4000**
  [www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org)
- Medway Citizens Advice Bureau **01634 383760**
  [www.medwayadvice.org.uk](http://www.medwayadvice.org.uk)
- Money Advice Service **0800 1387777**
  [www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk](http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk)
- Stepchange **0800 138 1111**
  [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)

Universal credit overview

Six types of benefit rolled into one monthly payment:

- **Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance**
- **Income-related Employment and Support Allowance**
- **Income Support**
- **Child Tax Credit**
- **Working Tax Credit**
- **Housing Benefit**

Universal credit

Get in touch with your Housing Officer as soon as you find out you’re moving to Universal Credit. We can help you set up payments and get any help and advice you might need.

**What is Universal Credit?**
It’s a benefit for working aged people that replaces a number of other benefits and tax credits. It’s a single monthly payment for people in or out of work. The idea is to make it easier to move into and out of work because you don’t need to transfer to a different benefit as your situation changes.

**It replaces:**
- income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance;
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- Income Support;
- Child Tax Credit;
- Working Tax Credit;
- Housing Benefit.
When will it affect me?

Universal credit is being rolled out in stages in Medway from October 2015.

What’s different about Universal Credit?

• You need to be online
  You make your claim and check your payments and updates online.

• You need a bank account
  Your payment will be made into a transactional bank account. Please note that Universal Credit can’t be paid into a Post Office card account. See the Universal Credit video at www.medway.gov.uk/universalcredit for advice on getting the right type of account.

• You need to pay your rent or charges to us directly
  Your payment will include any help you get towards rent and charges. You need to arrange payments to us directly. We suggest setting up a direct debit payment to us for the day your Universal Credit payment arrives in your account. That way you don’t need to remember to pay or worry about how much you have left for other things. Call us to set one up.

  Remember, your Universal Credit payment may not be enough to cover your rent and service charges. You will still need to pay the full amount due in addition to any shortfall.

• You get a single monthly payment
  You’ll need to manage your bills and costs for the whole month. For help with setting a budget and managing your money, contact the Money Advice Service.

Saving tips

• Never go food shopping when you are hungry – this will lead to purchases that are not essential.

• Make a shopping list and stick to it – planning your meals for the week will help you see the real cost of food. Try to avoid making it up as you go as you could end up buying food that you won’t use.

• Revisit your monthly bills – identify your priority and non-priority expenditure to see where you can make savings.

• Don’t be put off paying back what you owe – Council Tax should be cleared in the same year so if you don’t pay for six months, it will cost you twice as much for the next six months.

• Plan for the worst – we all have unexpected costs from time to time, so by allowing extra room in your budget for small regular savings can help you deal with the unexpected costs.

• Shop smart – two for one offers are not always the best deal. Compare the price by weight to see the true cost.

• Avoid bank charges – these can be as high as £35 for one failed transaction, that’s half of some people’s weekly income.

• Maximise your entitlements – if you are claiming tax credits or other benefits make sure you update changes in circumstances as soon as they happen.

• Avoid eating out – this can prove very expensive compared to a well-planned meal.

• Take some time to sit down and work out a budget. A full income and expenditure list can help you to effectively manage your money and avoid falling short. It may even help you to start saving a little.
Your community
Community involvement

Are you interested in helping us decide how we deliver housing services in Medway? We have developed a range of opportunities for you to get involved in how we operate, in a way that suits you.

Our objectives are to:
- Provide you with a wide range of opportunities for involvement and engagement, including face to face, online and email consultation;
- Engage with a wide representation of our customer profile;
- Support resident and community development;
- Focus activities on service improvement and monitor outcomes;
- Increase access to the service by providing information on our Housing Services Facebook Page and online.

Structure

A brief description of the roles is detailed on the next page. All roles are voluntary however we will reimburse travel costs and provide relevant training where required to support residents in their roles.
Partnership and performance meetings

Each of these meetings will focus on a specific service area (such as anti social behaviour or capital works). Service users will be invited to carry out service reviews and present their recommendations to senior officers.

Sounding board workshop/online

The sounding board is used as a method to consult residents on policy and publications. There are two formats to the 'customer sounding board', represented by online consultation and resident forums.

Customer catch up days

Themed catch up days, open to all residents that will allow customers to keep up to date with any changes to the service.

Estate champion

This role involves going on estate inspections alongside housing officers to monitor estate standards and making recommendations for environmental improvements.

Energy efficiency champion

This role involves visiting households to give advice on how residents can save money on their energy bills.

Residents can also become involved by:
- Setting up a Resident Association
- Return surveys including our bi-annual STAR survey
- Attending our estate inspections
- Attending community clean up days

We will also support Mears’ Continuous Improvement Group with their role to monitor and challenge our repairs service.

If you would like to be involved email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk, phone the community development officer on 01634 333201 or ask your housing officer. You will be added to our people bank, a database of customers we will consult with on aspects of the housing service.

Housing Matters magazine

Keep a look out for Housing Matters - our resident magazine. This will keep you informed of what is happening in housing services and any issues that may affect you as a resident. You can view this magazine on our housing web page.
Your local area

Sure Start

There are a total of 19 Sure Start Centres across Medway that offer information and services for families with young children aged from birth to five years. Based in the local community, they are great places to access services and meet new people.

Sure Start is the government’s programme to support young children and families. The multiagency approach means that early learning, health and family support can be found all in one place. The centres aim to actively support parents in their aspirations towards employment, education and training. The Sure Start approach ensures that every child gets the best possible start in life and helps parents choose with confidence how you can balance work and family commitments.

What services do they provide?
Sure Start Children’s Centres provide a variety of support and services to local families including:
• drop-in sessions for parents and children – play activities, music, story time and many more;
• ante-natal classes and baby clinics;
• encouragement and support for parents thinking about training or finding a new job;
• links with local schools and voluntary agencies;
• information and advice about breastfeeding, speech and language, parenting, health issues and all the difficult times that can be experienced with babies and young children.

Where are my local Sure Start centres?

Brompton Children’s Centre (Brompton)
Opening times are Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm (phone: 01634 844152).

Burnt Oak Children’s Centre (Gillingham)
Opening times are Monday to Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm (phone: 01634 334344).

Saxon Way Children’s Centre (Gillingham)
Opening times are Monday to Friday, 7.30am-6pm (phone: 01634 852320).

Woodlands Children’s Centre (Gillingham)
Opening times are Monday to Friday, 7.30am-6pm (phone: 0300 065 8212 and school office 0300 065 8200).

Hand in Hand Children’s Centre (Twydall Infant School)
Opening times are Monday to Friday, 7am - 6pm (phone: 01634 365985).

Riverside Children’s Centre (Rainham)
Opening times are Monday to Thursday 8.30am-4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am-4pm (phone: 01634 338700).

Miers Court Sure Start Children’s Centre
Opening times Monday to Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm (phone: 01634 388943).

Deanwood Children’s Centre
Opening times Monday to Friday, 8am-5.30pm (phone: 01634 231901).

For more information visit
www.medway.gov.uk
Youth Centres

Youth Centres are a great place to go for eight to 19-year-olds. Young people can socialise and learn new skills.

The staff are supportive and professional. Most are experienced workers who come from a range of backgrounds. There is a dance studio, music room, social area and a café. There is also a variety of equipment available, including a pool table, karaoke and games consoles. It’s also a great place to make new friends and build confidence through activities like art workshops open afterschool session for young people and fun sessions with projects including the Adventure Service Challenge and cooking.

Our youth projects offer:
• opportunities for young people to develop their physical, social and emotional abilities and to experience achievement, leadership, enjoyment, friendship and recognition;
• organised programmes for physical activities, such as dance and sports, and for academic and arts programmes, such as science, crafts and theatre;
• unstructured activities, such as game playing, socialising, club meetings and outdoor recreation.

While unstructured activities are an essential part of youth centres, the centres are staffed by youth workers who set up the activities and ensure the wellbeing of participants.

Youth workers
Youth workers promote the personal, educational and social development of young people aged between 13 and 19 years. Their role is to promote programmes to engage young people and to empower individuals to take action on issues affecting their lives, such as health, education, unemployment and the environment, by developing positive skills and attitudes.

For more information contact Youth Service by phone: 01634 332286 or by email: youth.enquiries@medway.gov.uk
Write to: Youth Service, Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

Where are my local youth centres?

• Woodland Youth Centre
  Woodlands Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 2BX
  Follow Woodlands Youth Centre on facebook, www.facebook.com/woodlandsyouthcentre
  Email: woodlands.youth@medway.gov.uk
  Phone: 01634 852300

• Parkwood Youth Centre
  Parkwood Green, Deanwood Drive, Rainham, Kent ME8 9PN
  Email: parkwood.youth@medway.gov.uk
  Phone: 01634 233846
Community hubs

Community hubs provide customer services and library services under one roof. They provide face to face contact for a variety of enquiries about council and partner services.

To find your nearest community hub visit www.medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333333.

Libraries

Medway Council libraries offer more than a variety of books, including access to public computers and free computing courses; areas for children and young people and are a place to discover the latest films and TV Series. To join the library today, register at www.medway.gov.uk/libraries or visit your local library. To find out where the closest library is to you phone 01634 333333.

Healthy living

Want to give up smoking: www.abettermedway.co.uk/smokefree.aspx

Want help in maintaining a healthy weight www.medway.gov.uk/healthyway

Medway Libraries hosts drop-in sessions from various support groups, to help you achieve your health goals.
Moving on
If you are looking to move on then there are a number of ways in which we may be able to assist you.

Tenants’ Incentive Scheme

The Tenants’ Incentive Scheme helps council tenants move to a smaller home. We understand that personal circumstances change and your current home may no longer meet your needs. Families grow up, children move out and tenants are often left with a large property that is:

• difficult to manage;
• difficult to clean;
• expensive to heat;
• no longer meets your requirements.

If any of the above applies to you and you are willing to move to smaller accommodation, you may be entitled to an incentive payment.

How does it work?

Tenants who want to move through this scheme are awarded band A priority on the housing list. This means they have a good chance of transferring to a property of their choice.

You would be given this priority if your home has more bedrooms than you need and you want to move to a home with fewer bedrooms. For example, if your current home has two bedrooms and you only want one bedroom.

Am I eligible?

The scheme is available to tenants who meet the following criteria:

• You must be a secure tenant of Medway Council.
• You can be a single person or a couple.
• Your property must be suitable for re-letting to a family. This includes houses, flats, and maisonettes.

We will also consider separate housing for families under occupying their property. For example, if a couple with an adult child is under occupying, we could house you in two one-bedroom flats rather than a two-bedroom flat.

Where can I move to?

• A property suitable for your family make up.
• A supported housing unit for elderly people.
• A property through nomination to a registered social landlord (commonly known as a housing association).
• Consideration will also be given to tenants of three bedroom properties or more who may only be eligible for a one bedroom property but have requested two bedroom accommodation due to care needs or family circumstances.

How will I get paid?

Payment is through a cheque payable into your chosen bank. It is essential that you have a bank account.

When is the payment made?

The payment is made after you have moved into your new home. Payment will normally be made within two weeks of the move taking place. If you owe any money to Medway Council for rent-related debt or for repairs, this will be deducted from any money that you are eligible for.

If you cannot afford to pay for removals then the council may be able to pay the removal company directly.

How do I apply?

Phone your housing officer on 01634 333344 to make an application. There is more information available online at www.medway.gov.uk/housing.
Transfers

If you would like to move to another Medway Council home, you can do so through a transfer. To do so, you will need to register with Kent Homechoice. For more information visit www.medway.gov.uk/housing or contact your housing officer.

Mutual exchange

If you would like to move to another council or housing association property you can do so through a mutual exchange. A mutual exchange is where you swap your home with another tenant, this can be either within or outside of Medway.

If you are interested then contact your housing officer so you can be added to a list. To be eligible you must be up to date with your rent and your property must be in a good condition.

You will need our permission to exchange. If you want to exchange with the tenant of another landlord, you will need our permission and that of the other landlord in writing.

Succession

Council tenancies can be passed on once by succession (after the tenant’s death) or assignment.

For example, after one joint tenant dies and their rights are transferred to the surviving joint tenant by succession, it is not possible for the tenancy to be assigned to anyone else.

If there has been no previous succession or assignment, secure council tenants can only assign their tenancy to certain people.

Tenancies starting before 1 April 2012
For council secure tenancies which started before 1 April 2012, you can assign your tenancy to your:
• spouse or registered civil partner, as long as they are living with you;
• cohabiting partner or another member of your family (this includes children, parents, siblings and most other close relatives), as long that person has been living with you for at least one year.

Tenancies starting after 1 April 2012
For council secure or flexible tenancies which started on or after 1 April 2012 the tenancy can be assigned to the tenant’s spouse, civil partner or cohabiting partner who is living with them. Sometimes the tenancy agreement allows it to be assigned to another family member as well.

Introductory tenants
Introductory tenants have the same right to assign their tenancy as a secure tenant whose tenancy began on or after 1 April 2012.
Moving out

If you’re moving out of your home you must contact your Housing Officer and give Medway Council notice in writing that you wish to terminate your tenancy.

Unless you are transferring to another Medway Council property, you must give us at least four weeks notice beginning on a Monday.

You will be responsible for paying your rent until the end of your notice period.

Your housing officer will arrange to inspect the property before the end of your tenancy.

This visit will allow us to do three things:

1. We can identify and agree with you any repairs that you will need to undertake before handing the keys back to the property, to avoid being recharged for the works.

2. We can also identify and agree any improvements you’ve made to the property which you might be able to get compensation for.

3. We can identify and notify contractors of any repair work that the property needs before it’s re-let.

Right to buy

If you are a secure tenant and have lived in your council home for at least three years then you have the right to buy your home at a discount. The amount of discount you are entitled to depends on how long you have been a qualifying tenant. You can call the home ownership officer on 01634 333219 for more detail on the scheme and how to make an application.
Comments, complaints and suggestions
Comments, complaints and suggestions

There may be times when you feel unhappy with the service you receive and wish to complain. If you make a complaint, we will investigate it thoroughly and promptly and let you know the outcome. Our complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage one

The people best placed to resolve any problem or concern you have are usually the people providing the service so, in the first instance, contact them direct with your complaint and they will try and sort things out straight away.

If you have had a positive experience of Medway’s housing service please let us know. If, though, you are unhappy with the service you receive or you want to make a complaint or suggestion, contact us using one of the methods below:

Email: customer.relations@medway.gov.uk
Phone: 01634 333333
Write to: Customer Relations, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

Alternatively you can make a complaint by going to www.medway.gov.uk and completing the online form.

Stage Two

Gives you the opportunity to take your complaint further if you are not happy with our response at stage one.

Our Customer Relations Team will look into your complaint and will acknowledge your complaint within three working days.

We will look into what has happened so far and answer you within 10 working days either by phone, email or letter to explain what we have done to put things right. If we cannot get back to you straight away we will let you know the reason for the delay and give you a date when we will reply.

To contact us with a stage two complaint you can:
Phone: 01634 332 456
Text relay: 18001 01634 332 456
Email: customer.relations@medway.gov.uk
Write to: Customer Relations, Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

If you are still not satisfied

Medway Council hopes that its complaints procedure will help to sort out quickly and successfully any problems you may have with the way its services are provided. However, if you are still not satisfied with the way we handle your complaint or the conclusions we reach you can have your complaint referred in one of two ways:-

Immediately after the completion of Stage two, the complaint can be referred to a ‘Designated Person’ by emailing designatedpersons@medway.gov.uk or eight weeks after the completion of Stage two, you may progress the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service without reference to the designated person at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower,
Harbour Exchange Square,
London,
E14 9GE

Phone: 0300 111 3000
(lines are open Monday to Friday from 9.15am - 5.15pm)
Fax: 020 7831 1942
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

At any stage you can contact your local councillor or use another person or organisation to contact us on your behalf (such as your MP or a community group)