Closures over the festive period
Medway Council and Mears repairs service will be closed from 4.45pm on 22 Dec and re-open on 28 Dec at 8.30am. We are also closed all day on 1 Jan 2018.

Anti-Social Behaviour
How to report activity in your community Page 3

Fire safety in your home
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Repairs freephone number including out of hours emergencies:
0800 0730300
Norse (Estate Services)
0845 8500319

Welfare Reform Team freephone:
0800 4088080
Housing Officer Duty Line
01634 333344

Community Development
01634 333201

Medway Council Housing Services
MedwayCouncilHousing @MCounciltenants

Serving You
Dear resident,

Welcome to this winter edition of Housing Matters, I hope you like our new online version that we told you about in the last edition.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the recent survey of Tenants and Residents. We will publish the results in the next edition in 2018 and tell you the actions we will be taking as a result of your feedback.

The team is busy putting together the next three year planned works programme of improvements to your homes and estates. We spent approximately £15million over the last 3 years on similar works and propose to spend around the same amount over the next three years too. We will publish the programme in the next edition so you know what works to expect.

We are also preparing our budgets for next year and need to make sure we spend your money on our services wisely and in the most cost effective way. We will hold the annual budget setting meeting with residents in the New Year to explain how we will be spending your money. Look out for details on our website and Facebook page.

A significant change that some residents will face in the New Year is the way in which you receive your benefits. The Government are introducing a new way in which these will be paid called Universal Credit. Roll out of this begins in May 2018 and more details about this can be found on page 6. It is very important that you read this article if you are of working age and in receipt of Housing Benefit. Our Welfare team are here to help answer any questions you have to support the transition.

If you have any suggestions for future articles or would still like to be sent a paper copy please contact us by email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or call 01634 333201.

Finally, I wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2018

Tomasz Kozlowski
Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration
Reporting Anti-Social Behaviour…..

Whilst we all want to live happily together, we recognise that sometimes, residents encounter unreasonable behaviour from their neighbours that causes distress to an individual or their community. We class this type of behaviour as anti-social behaviour, which we of course do not condone.

If you encounter this type of behaviour from another person you should report it to Landlord Services. If it is an illegal activity such as those involving drugs or violence you should also contact the police. Our Housing Officers work closely with the police to tackle anti-social behaviour and speak to them daily about any high level incidents.

It is not always possible to take action without evidence. To help us you will be asked to complete and send us diary sheets on which you record: times; dates; the identity of alleged perpetrators; and the affect the anti-social behaviour is having on you. This evidence will be used to support any necessary action taken and is essential if the case is to progress further.

If the Council or Police receive evidence that a resident is causing anti-social behaviour on a regular basis, the Council will take action to start legal proceedings against them for breaching their tenancy conditions. This could lead to them being evicted from their property.

If you suffer problems with noise on a regular basis from a particular resident you should contact the Environmental Protection Team on 01634 333333 to report the incident. You should also contact the Housing Officer Team as both sections would require you to complete diary sheets to assist the Council in taking action against the perpetrator.

To report Anti Social Behaviour to Landlord Services phone 01634 333344 or email hrahousingofficers@medway.gov.uk

To report a crime or anti-social behaviour that is in progress phone Kent Police on 101. Should you feel your safety is at risk you should contact the Police immediately by dialling 999 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. All reports will be treated in the strictest confidence.

You can read a copy of our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy on our website and download diary sheets on which to record incidents that you may be facing.

Case study
In 2017 a resident was causing distress to neighbours by playing loud music and behaving inappropriately. Residents reported this to Landlord Services and were asked to complete diary sheets.

The diary sheets the residents completed allowed us to build up a case against the resident. The case went to court and the Council was granted a suspended possession order, which would allow us to take action to evict the resident if their anti-social behaviour continued.

Without residents filling in their diary sheets we wouldn’t have been able to get this result.
Abuse against staff....

Landlord Services expects all staff and contractors to be treated with common courtesy at all times.

There have been occasions when staff have been verbally abused or even threatened with violence; this is unacceptable.

The Council will take action if staff are assaulted or face unreasonable conduct from tenants and this could ultimately end with the tenant being evicted.

In return we expect our staff to treat customers with the highest level of customer service.

Should you wish to make a formal complaint about any service failure we have a formal complaints process which can be found on our website: [www.medway.gov.uk/information/contactus/complaintsandcompliments](http://www.medway.gov.uk/information/contactus/complaintsandcompliments)

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Grounds Maintenance at Centenary Gardens

From Monday 9 October, Medway Norse took over responsibility for the grounds maintenance of the whole Centenary Gardens site. They are proud to be delivering the grounds maintenance of this design award winning site for the HRA service at Medway Council.

Don’t forget that if you have any problems with the Estate Services, you can phone the Medway Norse Helpdesk on Freephone 0845 8500319 or email norse.helpdesk@ncsgrp.co.uk
Fire Safety in your Home

Free safe and well visits from Kent Fire and Rescue Service
You may be eligible for a free safe and well visit from Kent Fire and Rescue Service, if you are...
- Over 70 or you care for someone over 70
- Caring for someone living with dementia
- Living with children under the age of five in the property
- Live with five or more occupants in the property
- A smoker
- Live with potential fire setters (someone who is likely to start a fire)
- Live with a disabled occupant
- Live with someone who doesn’t feel safe in their home.

...please call KFRS’s safe and well visit team on 0800 923 7000 or email: home@kent.fire-uk.org for some home safety advice or to see if you’re eligible for a visit from their team.

If you’re not eligible for a safe and well visit, there are extra steps you can take to help keep you and your loved ones safe.

Fire safety aids are available to buy, including:
- Fire-resistant sheets and pillowcases
- Remote smoking ashtrays
- Automatic shut-off switches for ovens and hobs
- Electrical socket guards
- External post boxes
- Key safes.

Some top tips to help residents stay safe over the festive season
- Make sure your family, and any visitors staying for the festive period, know what to do in an emergency.
- Ensure you switch off fairy lights and unplug them before you go to bed, or before you leave the house. Check they conform to the British Standard and are in good working order before use.
- In the event of a fire – get out, stay out and call 999 and ask for the fire service.

Fire risk assessment works
Your safety is important to us!
People that live in council owned blocks of flats will already have or be having fire risk assessment works done to their property in order to both prevent fires and make them safer for residents if a fire were to break out. Medway Council have a legal obligation to undertake improvement works to our properties in order for them to comply with the Fire Regulation Order 2005. These works include installing all or a combination of interlinked smoke detection, 30 minute fire resistant external doors, and fitting means of escape hinges to your windows and any other associated works identified during the fire risk assessments undertaken by surveyors.

As per your tenancy agreement you are obliged to provide access to the property for these works to be carried out. Failure to allow access could result in the Council having to obtain a court warrant to force entry to your property or for us to start eviction proceedings against you for breach of tenancy.

Please remember that these works are done to make sure you are safe in your home.

If you have any questions about these works please contact our contractor carrying out the works “Vento” on the details below.
- Head Office: 01752 253277 (dedicated Medway Council line)
- Vento Medway Site Office: 01634 570736
- Email: medway@ventrogroup.com

Gas safety inspections
Your annual gas inspection is essential and action will be taken against tenants who refuse us access.
If you cannot be in at the time offered an alternative appointment can be made by calling Mears on 0800 073 0300 (option 1).

What to do if you smell gas?
- turn off the gas at the meter unless it is in the cellar or basement
- do not smoke or strike matches
- do not turn electric switches on or off
- put out any naked flames
- open doors and windows
- keep people away from the affected area
- phone the National Grid emergency number 0800 111 999 and report the suspected leak.
The benefits system is changing

Medway residents will soon see a change in the way they receive their benefits and tax credits.

The Department of Work and Pensions will be rolling out Universal Credit for all Medway residents from May 2018.

Universal Credit has been in place in Medway since October 2015 for residents who live on their own and are on a low income or out of work. They receive a single payment each month instead of receiving their benefits or tax credits as separate payments.

If you are currently of working age and get any of the following benefits, you will remain on these until you transfer to Universal Credit.

- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Based)
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit

You could move to Universal Credit if there is a change of circumstance to one of the benefits you already receive, or if you need to make a new claim.

People who claim these benefits and do not need to change will still transfer as part of a managed process to Universal Credit by 2022.

Council tenants who it is anticipated will be affected by Universal Credit will receive a letter. It will take a number of years to transfer every resident who currently receives benefits or tax credits onto the Universal Credit scheme. In the meantime we would continue to encourage residents who receive benefits to report any changes in their circumstances.

In the new year we will be holding weekly drop-in surgeries and roadshows at key sites across Medway for residents to find out more information about Universal Credit. Further details will be posted on our website and Medway Council tenants can phone 0800 4088080 for free advice from our dedicated welfare reform team.

Do you get help paying your rent?

If your rent is currently paid directly to your landlord, in the future it will be paid directly to you. This is known as Housing Costs and you will be responsible for paying your rent to your landlord.

Do you get help with your council tax?

Claims for Council Tax Reduction will remain with Medway Council. If you claim Universal Credit with the Department for Work and Pensions and you already receive Council Tax Reduction you will not need to reapply, but if you are a new claimant for Council Tax Reduction, you will need to apply through the council.

How to get ready for Universal Credit

Here are a few steps you can take now to make sure you are prepared for Universal Credit.

1. Make sure you have approved identification documents.
2. Open a bank account if you don’t have one.
3. Keep some money aside for a rainy day. Payments could take six weeks to arrive.
4. Become digitally confident as claims are managed online.
5. Don’t delay if you need to make a claim.

Come and talk to us about Universal Credit and get advice on benefits and budgeting

The Welfare Reform Team are holding weekly drop in sessions at Twydall Library on alternate Wednesday mornings (10am to 12pm) and Thursday afternoons (1pm to 4pm). No appointments needed, just come along, visit our website for more details. You can also contact the Welfare Reform Team on Freephone 0800 4088080
Don’t catch a cold…make sure your heating is now switched on for winter. We advise you to check your heating system works correctly and efficiently before the cold weather bites further.

**Hot tips for getting your heating on:**
- Turn your heating on with the timer/programmer.
- Turn your room thermostat up.
- Check all radiators are turned on and any thermostatic radiator valves are up to max.
- Wait for 20-30 minutes and check all the radiators one by one to ensure they’re all heating up.
- Check the radiators to ensure they’re heating up fully across the radiator and there are no cold spots.
- If all your radiators are heating up and there are no cold spots then turn your room stat down and the heating off on your timer/programmer.

If you experience any problems with your central heating system, please contact Mears on **0800 0730300** (choose option 1 for the Gas Team) and we will arrange for a gas engineer to visit you.

**Keeping your home warm this winter**

It’s important for your health to keep your home warm during winter. If you’re struggling to afford your energy bills, you might be able to take advantage of certain benefits, grants and help offered by the government and energy suppliers. Visit [https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating](https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating) for more information.

- Close the curtains in the evenings and fit thermal linings if you can. This will keep the heat in.
- Keep your bedroom window closed at night when the weather is cold. The coldest time of the day is just before dawn and breathing in cold air increases the risk of chest infections.
- Keep your main living room heated to 70°F (21°C).
- Heat your bedroom to 64°F (18°C).

**Electric Blankets**
- Never use a hot-water bottle and an electric blanket together
- Get your electric blanket checked every three years by an expert
- Check whether your electric blanket can be kept on all night. Some blankets should only be used to warm the bed before you get in. If you have continence difficulties, talk to your doctor before using one.
Working
together with... Prince’s Trust

Over the recent months Landlord Services have been working with the Prince’s Trust to help improve the opportunities offered to younger residents in Medway.

The Prince’s Trust Chatham Centre is based in the Historic Dockyard and offers fantastic opportunities through the Fairbridge programme for people aged 13 to 25 to work towards their goals. Visit the Prince’s Trust website for more information.

On 19 September, housing staff visited the Prince’s Trust and held workshops on housing options, what it means to be a good tenant and budgeting. The trust’s young people benefited from the day, as did their staff that could then pass on the knowledge to other members.

On the 31 October, Landlord Services also worked with the Prince’s Trust to hold an open day for young people aged 16 to 25. The Halloween themed event promoted the trust’s programmes and opportunities for younger people to get into employment.

We hope to continue to work closely with the Prince’s Trust in the future.

Residents’ corner

From Pole to Pole

In fear and trepidation, I embarked upon an interesting and unique experience with 11 other colleagues. Starting off the journey of 1000 miles, I had the inspiration of Paul Meegan (Guinness World Record holder for the longest walk).

Each session began with a warm-up routine. We learned the ‘steps’ of Nordic Walking, such as Posture, Planting, Extending, etc. After the warm-up, we practiced a number of the steps and each week built upon what we had previously learned.

Over each of the weeks that followed, we were encouraged to deepen our skills with the final two sessions incorporating such wonders as walking up and downhill.

It was an excellent group of fellow travellers upon the path, all giving encouragement, enjoying each other’s company and a great learning experience. The Great Lines afforded members of the public the opportunity for comment and banter. Laura was an excellent walk leader and made each of the sessions an enjoyable experience. Now having completed the basic course, and achieving greater levels of fitness, a number of us are looking to continue the good work at Capstone Park.

For more information on the health walks and to get involved:
Telephone: 01634 333720
Email: walking@medway.gov.uk
www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/walkfinder/south-east/medway-health-walks
Have a say in your Landlord Service

We have a number of ways you can have a say on your Landlord Service: There are two main groups you could join:

1. Estate Champions regularly meet to act as voices for the community. Champions give us feedback on any issues in their area, such as repairs that need completing, Estate Services and Anti-Social Behaviour. Champions also review our policies and publications and work with us on community projects.

2. Youth Engagement Ambassadors act to give young people a voice in our service and access to development opportunities. This group is for residents aged up to 25 and their parents/relatives.

Alternatively you may wish to put your name down to attend resident meetings or consult on our policies and publications. For more information please email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone our Community Development Officer on 01634 333201.

View our calendar of meetings

Contact your Housing Officer
Find out who your Housing Officer is and how to contact them by visiting our Find my Housing Officer page

Landlord services hold weekly drop in sessions at Twydall Library on Tuesday afternoons 1pm to 4pm. You can come along and talk to a Housing Officer about any issues you may have.

Landlord Services online…..
For up to date information and advice on our services visit medway.gov.uk/housing

How are we doing?
Stay up to date with our latest performance by visiting our Housing Performance page.

Estate Inspections
Visit our Estate Inspection page to find out when your next inspection will be. We also advertise them on our Facebook page. Alternatively, contact the housing officer duty line on 01634 333344.

Leasehold Surgeries
Come along to a Leasehold Surgery to talk to about any issues you may have regarding your lease. Visit our Information for leaseholders page for dates and times.

Useful contacts

General council enquiries
Phone: 01634 333333 (Mon-Fri: 9am - 6pm)
Email: info@medway.gov.uk
Minicom: 01634 333111

Gas fire or boiler problems
Phone: 0800 073 0300 (option 1)

Medway Council Housing Services
Website: www.medway.gov.uk/housing
Email: housing@medway.gov.uk
Write to: Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

Housing benefit/council tax
Phone: 01634 332222
Email: ctax@medway.gov.uk

Please note: Calls to Medway Council may be recorded or monitored for security and staff development purposes. We ask that you respect officers and we may take action if there are any incidents of verbal abuse.

This information can be made available in other formats from 01634 333333.