Grand opening of Centenary Gardens

Survey of Tenants and Residents

Pages 5 and 6

Repairs freephone number: 0800 0730300
Norse (Estate Services) 0845 8500319

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

Medway Council Housing Services
MedwayCouncilHousing @MCounciltenants
Dear resident,

Welcome to the summer edition of Housing Matters.

It is two years since we did our last survey and we want to make sure we are still doing the good things you told us about. The team works hard to provide you with the best service possible and we need to keep measuring how well you think we are doing now.

Please complete a new STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and you could win up to £100 of shopping vouchers. Find more details on page five.

In February 2017 former Housing Minister, Gavin Barwell, visited Centenary Gardens to formally open the new development and learn how its residents’ lives have been improved by moving into these new properties. We would like to thank everyone who supported the opening and the residents who kindly allowed us to look around their homes. Read details of the day on page four.

Landlord Services launched the third year of our current planned and capital maintenance works programme in April. In 2017/18 we will invest more than £1million on installing new kitchens and bathrooms, and rewiring homes. This year we will make more environmental improvements to our estates and will continue with our garage improvement programme.

Over the summer period our Housing Officers are carrying out evening estate inspections. We hope the later timing will make it easier for more residents to join us and discuss issues that are important to them. The inspections will be advertised in advance at medway.gov.uk and on estate notice boards.

If you have a story for Housing Matters, we’d love to hear from you. Please contact tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or call 01634 333201.

I hope you all continue to have a great summer and I look forward to receiving your STAR feedback forms over the next few weeks.

Tomasz Kozlowski
Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration
Communal areas must be kept free from obstructions at all times.

Residents and leaseholders are not allowed to store certain items in communal areas as they are considered fire risks. There are items that are not allowed to be kept in communal areas under any circumstances.

These include but are not limited to:
- Mobility scooters/ motor bikes - kept/ stored/parked or charged/refueled in communal areas.
- Pushchairs, buggies, prams, shopping trolleys
- Upholstered furniture, bedding or mattresses
- White goods
- Bicycles - within enclosed corridors and staircases
- Fuel containers or gas bottles
- General rubbish, black bags of rubbish, wheeled bins, bundles of newspapers or clothing

Procedures will be followed to remove, store or dispose items stored in communal areas if they are not removed by residents and leaseholders despite being asked to do so.

When an item is identified by an officer for removal a warning sticker will be attached to it saying it is a fire risk. Residents and leaseholders will be given 48 hours to remove the item. After this time Medway Council will remove the item and in order to collect their property residents will need to contact the housing officer duty line on 01634 333344.

Residents or leaseholders will be charged for any item stored by Medway Council.

It is not possible for Housing Services to remove and store all item/s found in communal areas. If property is not removed within 48 hours - as indicated on the attached warning notice - items deemed to be of low value or perishable will be disposed of.

The Management of Fire Risks in Communal Areas Policy and a full list of items that cannot be stored in communal areas can be found online at http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingpolicies.aspx
Grand opening of Centenary Gardens

Our new bungalow development, Centenary Gardens in Gillingham, was opened in February by former Housing and Planning Minister MP Gavin Barwell. He met some of the residents enjoying their new homes.

The new properties were completed last autumn as part of an £8.5 million housing development programme. There are 32 one and two bed bungalows which were designed with older tenants and people with mobility problems in mind.

Local MPs and councillors joined the former minister at the opening event. Mr Barwell said: "It was a fantastic opportunity to officially open Centenary Gardens today, an energy efficient bungalow site that showcases the range and diversity of our housing ambitions as set out in our Housing White Paper.

"Medway is leading the way in efforts to fix our broken housing market and making sure that this is a country that works for everyone."

To celebrate the day, Centenary Garden residents attended a lunch at the Woodlands Youth Centre prior to the opening. It gave them the chance to get to know their neighbours as well as officers from Landlord Services, Public Health and the Community Safety Partnership team.

The day was a huge success, with the story featuring on the national and local news. Landlord Services thank everyone who supported the opening and residents who kindly let us into their homes. We also thank Woodlands Youth Centre for hosting the lunch for residents. Everyone was impressed with the professionalism of the staff and young people there who had worked hard to make sure the event was a success.

Kelly Tolhurst MP, Councillor Alan Jarrett, Rehman Chishti MP and Gavin Barwell MP join some of the new residents of Centenary Gardens.
Our Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) asks you key satisfaction questions about our landlord services. The survey also helps us compare our performance with other housing organisations.

Since the last survey in 2015, the team has used your feedback and worked hard to improve the service.

For example, Landlord Services has:

- Invested more than £9million over the last two years on improving the condition of your homes.
- Fitted 237 kitchens, 225 bathrooms and 240 boilers into residents’ homes.
- Reduced your rent by 1% in April 2016 and by 1% again in April 2017.
- Built 56 new homes.
- Completed over 12,700 responsive repairs between September 2015 and May 2017 - 99% were completed on time.
- Achieved 99% customer satisfaction for the overall repairs service among customers who have been surveyed.
- Met 99% of repair appointments.
- Achieved 100% gas compliancy.
- Transferred our estate services to NORSE and completed the first year of the new contract. During this time customer satisfaction has increased to 88% from a baseline of 68%. Over the last year more than 90% of our estate inspections were rated as amber or above.
- Held a community clean-up event at Beechings Way in partnership with Mears - more than 20 bags of litter were collected.
- Conducted a three year programme of improvements to fire safety in your homes that will be completed in March 2018.
- Developed our 2016 Local Offers based on your STAR feedback.
- Ranked first compared to other providers with a similar stock size for the average time to re-let empty properties. During April 2016 to March 2017 it took an average 12 calendar days to re-let a property.
- Worked in partnership with Barclays Digital Eagles to develop residents’ basic computer skills.
STAR continued

- Improved our partnerships with the police and Community Safety Partnership Team. This means better communication and data sharing on cases that will help reduce and tackle anti-social behaviour on estates.
- Boosted our digital communication by regularly updating our Facebook page with the latest housing news. We have also launched a Twitter page.
- Helped people avoid social isolation by holding a party to celebrate the Queen’s 90th birthday for more than 70 residents aged 60-plus. They enjoyed a wartime themed dance and exercise class and a quiz on the royal family.
- Introduced our new community engagement structure in 2016/17. In July 2016 we launched our Estate Champion group which allows residents to be a voice for their area.
- Started a collaborative working agreement with Public Health, who now attend our community events. Housing officers attend courses to be more aware of dementia, mental health, and social isolation.
- Hosted a Big Lunch at Twydall Church Hall in June 2016 that focused on healthy lifestyles. It was run in partnership with Mears and Public Health.
- Developed the Landlord Services Young Persons Engagement Strategy 2016 – 2021 in conjunction with our residents and partners. It was published in August 2016.
- Opened the new Twydall Hub and started local surgeries to help make residents more aware of our services.
- Reduced our rent arrears by over £77,000 from April 2015 to June 2017.
- Supported tenants in need of financial advice and assistance through our welfare reform team. In 2015/16 and 2016/17 the team helped tenants to receive £64,772 worth of discretionary housing benefit payments and to claim backdated housing benefit totalling £122,494.

We hope that you recognise the improvements to the service over the past two years. Your feedback is essential and helps us continue to make the changes that make a difference to our service.

Please do take a few minutes to complete the enclosed STAR form. Return it to us in the freepost envelope provided by no later than 17 September 2017 and you will be entered into our free prize draw with a chance to win up to £100 of shopping vouchers.

Don’t forget: Universal Credit starts to roll out in Medway in February 2018.

Universal Credit is a new benefit for people of working age. It will replace benefits including jobseeker’s allowance, income support and housing benefit.

People who get Universal Credit will have their housing benefit paid directly to them, rather than to the council. This means you will be responsible for paying your rent to the council. It is important you have a bank account for the money to be paid into.

If you think this might affect you and you have a question, please call our welfare reform team on 0800 4088080.

In autumn we will hold a series of roadshows to provide more information on Universal Credit. Dates and venues will be advertised nearer the time.
The majority of council residents keep their homes clean and tidy. Unfortunately, there are times when the poor condition of a property prevents our staff from working.

Sometimes this is a result of a resident being unable to care for themselves. Where people need extra help, Mears and Medway Council have a safeguarding policy in place.

Residents can also become unaware of the hazards in their home. To assist these residents we are pleased to explain what standards are unacceptable when Mears staff come to work in your home.

- Animal/human faeces or urine on floors or surfaces (including cat litter trays)
- Large amounts of rubbish attracting flies in the work area
- Smoking in the area where our employees are working
- Clutter, such as washing up, where an employee is expected to work

If your home is kept clean and tidy Mears staff will be happy to work there. Alternatively, you may find that the work you request will not be done until the condition of the property is improved.

Do refresh your memory of the number of pets allowed in a property, and the rules for keeping them. There are also some animals that you are not allowed to keep, such as dogs listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

You can find the policy and guide online at http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingpolicies.aspx or you can request a copy by phoning the housing officer duty line.

Please note you must register each pet that lives in your household. Do this online at http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/councilhousing/counciltenants/keepingpets.aspx or call the housing officer duty line for a pet registration form.
Homes for Independent Living residents attended the annual quiz in December. Residents from across Medway’s schemes took part in competitive but fun evening with help from HFIL staff who organised the evening.

Congratulations to residents from Woodchurch House who won for the first time, to Suffolk Court in second place and Longford Court in third.

In January the council’s environmental services team secured a conviction at Medway Magistrates Court as the result of an investigation into a fly tip on HRA land at St Alban’s Close.

The offender was fined £1,000 plus £100 victim surcharge. He was also ordered to pay costs of £1,644, totalling £2,764. You can report fly tipping online at medway.gov.uk/flytipping or call 01634 333333.

Shop and coffee mornings at Asda Gillingham Pier, every Wednesday in the café.

Turn your weekly shopping trip into a sociable outing. Anyone is welcome to join us for a cuppa and a chat any time between 11.30am and 2pm. Stay as long as you like. No booking, just turn up.

Woodlands Youth Centre is a great place to 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 such as art workshops.

Contact Woodlands Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 2BX, email woodlands.youth@medway.gov.uk or call 01634 335474.
Is your sink blocked?

Residents need to try and clear a blocked sink before Mears can attend.

Here is some advice:

**Do…**

Use a plunger. These are available in DIY and hardware stores for a small cost.

1. Remove any hair or debris from the sink hole.
2. Block the overflow with a damp tea towel.
3. Fill the sink with just enough water to cover the surface of the plunger and plunge rapidly.
4. Do this a few times and check to see if the water flows down the sink hole.

It’s always best to run the taps for a while afterwards to ensure the blockage has dispersed.

**Don’t…**

Use a corrosive liquid drain clearer. Some drain clearer products available in shops contain up to 91% sulphuric acid which can cause severe burns to your skin and tarnish stainless steel kitchen sinks.

If you have tried and still cannot unblock the sink call the repairs team on **0800 0730300**.

**When Mears attend a blocked sink it is important you tell them exactly what you have tried to do to unblock the sink.**

If you have used a liquid drain clearer Mears operatives will be at risk of burns.

**Please remember:** Do not to put the following items down the drain. They cause blockages which are expensive to clear.

- Toilet - nappies and wet wipes, sanitary items, cosmetic wipes and cotton buds
- Kitchen/bathroom sink - excess liquids, food scraps, cooking oil (it cools and solidifies in the pipework)

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**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.
Fraud awareness

In May Landlord Services worked in partnership with Age UK Medway to hold a scam buster’s event run by Barclays Bank. The event raised awareness of fraud and banking scams. The event was attended by residents and regulars from the Age UK centre. Some residents stayed on for lunch afterwards to find out more about what the Age UK centre has to offer.

Be fraud smart

Protect yourself against fraud
As scams are getting more and more sophisticated it pays to know what to look out for. Scammers can contact you over the phone, by email, by text message or may even show up on your doorstep.

How to spot a scam
There are some general signs that should set alarm bells ringing:

● You’re asked to make an advance payment
● You get a call, text, email or letter out of the blue
● You’re asked to give personal details, passwords or PIN numbers
● You’re pushed to make a quick decision
● You’re promised something that sounds too good to be true

How to avoid being scammed

● Never give out personal information or bank account details to someone you don’t know
● Don’t reply to suspicious letters received in the post
● If you receive a suspicious phone call, hang up and don’t give out any personal details
● The same goes for emails – do not reply, click on links or download attachments
● Always ask people for ID if they come to your home

● Check statements carefully and notify your bank if there are any unexpected transactions
● Keep important personal documents, bank cards and cheque books in a safe and secure place
● Keep your online devices secure - always use passwords and avoid sharing access with others

How to report a scam
It’s very distressing to be caught out by a scam. It’s important to report it to try and stop the scammer from striking again. If you think you have been the victim of a scam you should stop sending money to the firm or individuals straight away. If you have shared any bank details then call your bank immediately. Report the scam to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or online at actionfraud.police.uk

Do not respond to cold callers
If you are ever in any doubt about whether or not a tradesman has been sent by Medway Council, ask them for ID and contact the repairs team to verify their identity.

You can request a stop cold calling pack - call 01634 333 333 or email consumer.protection@medway.gov.uk
Residents’ corner

New friendships have been formed as a result of a mix and mingle social event for residents of Woodchurch House.

The event was held to promote health and wellbeing, and prevent social isolation, by helping residents in and around Woodchurch House to meet their neighbours and bring together their community. The event in January was organised by Landlord Services in partnership with the Public Health team and Moat.

Resident feedback was very positive... new friendship groups have formed and two residents of Moat have joined Woodchurch House social group.

This event has been shared as good practice at the Kent Housing Group and we hope other social providers will follow example. Due to the success of the afternoon more of these events have been held across our Homes for Independent Living schemes and we hope to involve more non-scheme residents in the future.

If you are aged 60 or over and would like to join us at one of our schemes for a coffee morning, please call 01634 333201.

Become a Better Medway Champion and help people enjoy a healthy lifestyle

Champions from A Better Medway’s (ABM) Health Improvement Services attended the mix and mingle events. Their support helps people understand more about wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle. Champions help share important messages about the work of A Better Medway teams and the services they deliver.

If you would like to become a Champion the programme runs free training courses for Medway residents to show them how to help people make good choices about healthy lifestyles and explain how they can access support services.

For more information on becoming A Better Medway Champion visit abettermedway.co.uk/aboutus/abettermedwaychampions.aspx. You can email abmchampions@medway.gov.uk or call 01634 332113.
Housing Matters is going online

In order to be more cost efficient our newsletter will be published online in the future and a hard copy will not be sent to each resident. We will let you know by email or text message when the winter edition is available online. Please inform your housing officer if your contact details have changed.

We understand not everyone has access to the internet and that some people find paper copies easier to read. If you would still like to receive a paper copy please let us know. Call 01634 333201 or email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk

Estate Inspections are now advertised online

Visit http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders/estateinspections.aspx to find out when your next inspection will be. We also advertise them on our Facebook page. Alternatively, contact the housing officer duty line.

How are we doing?

To keep updated with our latest performance visit http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingperformance.aspx

Tenant meetings and consultation

Regular meetings with our residents give you the chance to play an active part in running our services. View our calendar of meetings at http://www.medway.gov.uk/housingcouncilteantsleaseholders/haveasyinhousingservices.aspx

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

Useful contacts

Housing repairs
Phone: 01634 333601
Freephone: 0800 0730 300 (option 2)
Email: housingrepairs@medway.gov.uk

Out-of-hours emergency repairs
Phone: 01634 304400

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

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

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

Welfare reform freephone
Freephone: 0800 4088080

Housing officer duty line
Phone: 01634 333344

Community Development
Phone: 01634 333201

Want help to improve your computer skills?
Phone the Community Development Team on 01634 333201 to register your interest in future training courses.

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

If you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language please phone: 01634 335577.