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Repairs freephone number: 0800 0730300
Welfare Reform Team freephone: 0800 4088080
Norse (Estate Services) 0845 8500319

Medway Council Housing Services
MedwayCouncilHousing @MCounciltenants
Welcome to our Spring edition of Housing Matters… and my last.

My first news is to let you all know that I shall be leaving the council in July 2016 after working here for 12 years (four years in housing). Recruitment is currently underway for my replacement and I am sure the new Assistant Director will introduce him/herself to you soon. I have really enjoyed leading such an impressive housing service. I hope you recognise that some great improvements to the service we deliver to you have been made over the past few years. I have also enjoyed meeting many of you at residents’ meetings or out on our Estates.

Introducing residents corner

In December 2015 we held a Customer Sounding Board where we discussed the housing related articles you want featured in the magazine. Turn to page three to find out how you can have an input.

Based on new Government guidance we reduced your rent in April 2016 the guidance requires this to continue for the next three years. Of course this means that with less money coming in, we will have less to spend. Like any efficient organisation we have a business plan and ours will be reviewed to take account of having less money. Once our business plan is revised we will be clear about the money we will have to deliver services and invest in the stock. We will be holding a forum with residents once the plan is revised, in the meantime it is business as normal and we are confident of continuing to provide an excellent service.

In terms of housing we hope that within the next 12 months you will be able to view your rent accounts online, download statements or set up payment plans (just like many of you do with bank accounts). We recognise that the current way of sending out paper statements every quarter is outdated and we want to reduce the amount of paper we use and give you the option to view accounts whenever you want. Our next priority will be to give you the ability online to report repairs, track repairs already reported and make a repairs appointment with Mears.

In terms of this edition of Housing Matters as always I hope you will find it informative. There are details inside about how we have been continuing to improve your home and the estates where you live, a feature on fire safety and an article on fly-tipping.

Stephen Gaimster
Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration.

Dear resident,

We have revised our tenants’ welcome pack to make sure it is up to date with the most relevant information. To ensure that we are being as cost effective as possible and we can keep it easily updated, we have put the welcome pack online to view.

If you are unable to access it online or would like it in an alternative format, please email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.

We will be revising the Homes for Independent Living and Leaseholder Welcome Pack in the upcoming months and will keep you posted on the progress.

Visit the revised welcome pack, visit: www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders.aspx

Introducing residents corner

We asked you the residents:

- What you want to see in Housing Matters?
- What would make you read the whole magazine?
- What would be of interest and informative?

We had lots of ideas and suggestions, the one that was most prominent and exciting was that you the residents should have a page to shout about the events, groups and positive activities happening in your community.

We are going to introduce a Residents Corner so you can have an input into the magazine. Let us know if you or a member of your household are part of a community group or are involved in an event or activity that will positively impact on your community, we will share it with other residents.

Alternatively you can call us on 01634 333201 to discuss your ideas.

This is your chance to make Housing Matters your own!

Alternatively you may want us to feature an article in the magazine about certain aspects of housing or community based activities that may benefit you and your family.

To submit an idea, article or inform us of event email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk using Housing Matters as your subject title.
Significant investment has been made this year to the HRA stock. Alongside our programme of new build development, we recognise the importance of maintaining and improving our existing homes.

Mears improvement works
In partnership with Mears we have completed a programme of replacement boilers, kitchens, bathrooms, doors and our first ever programme of electrical re-wires. Customer satisfaction for these works has been excellent.

Health and safety compliance
We have completed a programme of asbestos surveys and remedial works, electrical testing, gas servicing, smoke detection and carbon monoxide alarm installations.

Estate improvement works
• Fencing has been replaced to the drying areas at the Cornish Manors in Gillingham.
• Following tenant consultation, knee-high fencing has been erected on the grassed areas of the Cornish Manors and Vidal Manor to prevent cars from parking on the green.
• Store Doors have been replaced at Benenden Manor, giving tenants and leaseholders greater security.
• Communal flooring has been replaced to the flats above Twydall Shops, providing an anti-slip durable floor covering that will be easier to maintain and keep clean during periods of poor weather.

Garages
20% of the HRA garage stock has been re-painted and repaired where necessary. Tenants of the garages have been pleased with the outcome.

Pitched roofing
Pitched roofs have been replaced at Forge Lane, Gillingham and Chilham Road, Twydall.

Cyclical redecoration
A further 600 of our properties benefitted from cyclical redecoration. The programme of work was undertaken by Mears, whose operatives re-painted previously painted external surfaces.

Passionate about the estate you live on?

Medway Council Housing Services and Norse want to hear from you!

Do you care about the condition and cleanliness of the estate you and your family live in?

Would you like to regularly feedback the issues faced by your estate directly to the Council and its estate services contractor Norse?

Do you have ideas for how your estate can be improved?

Do you already attend estate inspections and would like to have further involvement with housing services?

Want to meet other individuals that care about your community?

If the answer to any of the above is yes, become a voice for your community by volunteering to become an Estate Champion. Everyone is welcome, no previous experience is required.

If you want to sign up or find out more please contact the Medway Council’s Housing Community Development Officer on 01634 333201

Find us on Facebook Medway Council Housing Services
Follow us on Twitter MedwayCouncilHousing @MCouncilTenants
Leaseholders services

For billing and urgent contact, please inform housing services if you change your correspondence address and/or contact details, such as phone numbers and email addresses.

To update us on your details please email leaseholders@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333219.

Service charge payments

Leaseholders are urged to take their own independent financial advice on service charges if required.

To ensure you remain in-line with lease requirements, service charge invoices state payment terms of 30 days, unless an agreed payment arrangement can be made. Invoices will always include information on current payment methods and on the Mandatory and Discretionary Service Charge Loan policy.

If you pay by monthly standing order, it is your responsibility to ensure your payments are adjusted accordingly (up or down) upon receipt of a new service charge invoice and that payments will clear the amount owed within an allowed timeframe.

Actual Service Charge invoices (issued each September) will include costs for any major works carried out to blocks and for which you will be consulted in advance, under a formal ‘Section 20’ Consultation. It is within your best interest to obtain any financial advice you might need, during the Section 20 process and before resulting charges are billed in a service charge invoice.

Homes for independent living

On 29 February, Lucy Jacobs from Social Care attended the Homes for Independent Living Forum.

Lucy discussed The Care Act 2014 highlighting that carers such as husbands, wives, parents and friends providing necessary/essential care to an adult because of their age and/or disability can request a carer’s assessment through Medway Council.

This assessment helps identify what kind of essential support is being provided and whether the informal carer might need further support in the future in order to continue with that caring role. If eligible you may receive help with arranging adaptations, a four hour a week respite service or help to arrange registration of a carer’s emergency card.

How to get a carer’s assessment

If the person you care for lives in Medway, you simply need to phone 01634 334466 or email ss.accessandinfo@medway.gov.uk

Fly-tipping is illegal, dangerous and unsightly...

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’.

Between Oct 2015 and Feb 2016 Norse has responded to 320 reports of fly-tipping on HRA land, clearing up 50 tons – all of which has been household waste. The cost of chasing down the culprits and clearing up the mess is more than £5,250.

What’s being fly-tipped?

Generally large items, some too large to be dumped by an individual – so it’s not just black bags of rubbish.

Reducing the problem

Medway Council and Norse are committed to assisting in reducing this problem – it is ruining the appearance of your neighbourhoods.

Councils are using a number of measures to tackle fly-tipping, including using CCTV.

The consequences

Anyone who is caught fly-tipping will be prosecuted. Fly-tipping is a criminal offence which carries a fine of up to £50,000 and/or one year imprisonment. Serious cases carry an unlimited fine and a prison term of up to five years.

Fly-tipping is also a breach of your tenancy agreement and, if caught, it could lead to eviction from your property. Do not let it be you.

Report fly-tipping online at: www.medway.gov.uk/flytipping (reports can be made anonymously)

Bulky waste collection

If you have a large unwanted item such as a sofa, freezer, mattress, furniture or white goods that you would like to dispose of, book online at www.medway.gov.uk/bulkywaste or phone 01634 333333.

Consider donating good quality furniture to a charity shop or ask a member of staff at any of the three Household Waste and Recycling Centres about donating for reuse.
Clean for the Queen was a campaign to clear up Britain in time for Her Majesty the Queen’s 90th birthday, which will be officially celebrated in June 2016.

Members of staff from Housing Services and Mears took part on Wednesday, 2 March 2016, by litter picking at Beechings Way, Norfolk Close Garages, Beatty Avenue and Taswell Road.

We collected 19 bags of rubbish altogether and made some vast improvements in some of our areas. The photos on the right show a before and after at the litter pick on Taswell Road.

We will be doing more litter picks throughout the year, to nominate your road please email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.

Thinking about downsizing?

Want to move to a smaller property, but need help with moving and the costs involved?

Thinking about how much cheaper it would be to live in a smaller, more manageable, easier to heat home……then we may have the answer…..

We have a number of brand new one and two bedroom bungalows at Beatty Avenue Gillingham, which will be ready to let in the summer as part of our new Council House Building Programme.

We will take all the hassle out of the move by organising it for you and we may even pay your removal costs. You could also receive £500 for each spare bedroom you free up in your old property.

Full details of our Tenant Incentive Scheme can be found on our website www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders/iammovinghome/movingout.aspx

If you are interested in moving to one of the new bungalows or a smaller council property, register your interest by completing an online application form at www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/choice/home.aspx

For more information call the Housing Officer Duty line.

Disclaimer - Joining the housing register in no way guarantees or infers the Council will move you, all allocations are made in conjunction with the Council’s allocations policy or local lettings policies where applicable.

Get involved in Housing Services

Customer Sounding Board

Wednesday, 8 June, 6pm to 8pm, Civic Room, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham

This is your chance to have a say on what our strategies, policies and publications look like. This time we will be focusing on our Youth Engagement Strategy and our new Local Offers. We will have short presentations on each item followed by some workshops in order to get your ideas and opinions.

What do you want to learn?

Housing services would like to facilitate and signpost to training that benefits our residents.

We want you to tell us what you would be interested in learning or if you have ideas for training courses you would like us to provide.

Maybe you want to improve your computer skills or improve your CV writing and employability skills. Perhaps you want to learn more about budgeting and managing bills or you want to know more about improving your health or learn a new hobby.

Email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201 to let us know, we will publicise upcoming training courses on line and in future editions of Housing Matters.

Introduction to the repairs service – regular event

Not sure who Mears are and what they do? Confused about how to report a repair or whether something is your responsibility to fix? Want to find out more about the handyman service? Then these sessions are for you!

Medway are working with our repairs contractors Mears to put on Introduction to Your Repairs Service sessions for our residents. Mears will be leading on these regular training days and over a couple of hours will inform you of the repair journey - from reporting to completion and much more information.

If you are interested in any of these events or courses, email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.

If you are interested in downsizing, you can find more details about the new bungalows at Beatty Avenue and the Tenant Incentive Scheme on our website www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenants/leaseholders/iammovinghome/movingout.aspx.

For more information on how to move to a smaller property or if you are interested in the new bungalows, you can email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or call 01634 333201.

Housing Matters

Clean for the Queen

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We will be doing more litter picks throughout the year, to nominate your road please email tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.
Fire safety
Do you know what to do in the event of a fire in your property or block?

If the fire is IN your home:
• Call the Fire Service
• Get all occupants out quickly and safely avoiding the location of the fire
• Close all doors including the front door and go to a safe place

If the fire is NOT in your home:
• If you hear the fire alarm and the fire is not in your home, it’s usually safe to stay put
• 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 you are in the common parts and there is a fire:
• Leave the building by the escape route
• Ring the Fire Service
• Make your way to a safe place
• A fire officer/member of staff will inform when it is safe to re-enter your building

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.

Gas safety inspections
Your annual gas inspection is essential and action will be taken against tenants who refuse us access.

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
• call the National Grid emergency number 0800 111 999 and report the suspected leak.

Welfare reform
What is the benefit cap?
Benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of certain benefits you can get if you are working age. The benefit cap is to be reduced from autumn 2016.

From autumn 2016 the benefit cap will be:
• £384.62 a week, if you are a couple or have children and live outside London
• £257.69, a week if you are a single person and live outside London.

If you are affected by the reduction in the benefit cap, your Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will be reduced at some point from autumn 2016.

The websites below will give you more information and advice on the benefit cap and are regularly updated: www.entitledto.co.uk/help/benefits-cap www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Benefit-Cap/What-is-the-Benefit-Cap

You can also find out if you will be affected by the benefit cap by using the below online benefit cap calculator at www.gov.uk/benefit-cap-calculator

If you are concerned about the benefit cap, other issues connected to the welfare reform or just struggling financially, help is available.

Housing Services Welfare Reform Team
Our team can give you advice on the benefit cap, Universal Credit, dealing with debt and signpost you to other debt advice organisations. To speak to a member of 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
• Medway Citizens Advice Bureau 01634 383760 www.medwayadvice.org.uk
• Money Advice Service 0800 138 7777 www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
• Stepchange 0800 138 1111 www.stepchange.org
The Big Lunch

The Big Lunch aims to get as many people in the UK as possible to have lunch with their neighbours on one day this year in June.

We are holding our own Big Lunch in partnership with Mears and Public Health on 24 June, 12noon to 3pm at Twydall Church Hall. Our Big Lunch is focusing on Healthy Lifestyles and there will be lot of fun activities for all ages such as fitness workshops and messy play for children.

We are asking all attendees to bring their own picnics to enjoy on the day, why not share with your neighbours?

The event is open to all residents and leaseholders and there will be a free prize draw on the day with lots of prizes including shopping vouchers and smoothie makers.

If you would like to attend phone 01634 333201 or for more information visit: www.thebiglunch.com

How are we doing?

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

Estate Inspections are now advertised online

Visit http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing/councilhousing/estateservices/estateinspections.aspx to find out when your next inspection will be. We also advertise them on our Facebook page. Alternatively you can contact the Housing Officer Duty line to find out the date of your next Estate Inspection.

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 to 1pm (Sat)
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

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.

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

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