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

Welcome to our Winter edition of Housing Matters...

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Assistant Director of Physical and Cultural Regeneration. I joined Medway Council in June 2016 following Stephen Gaimster’s departure and look forward to working with both staff and residents to further develop the good work already taking place in the service.

I hope you find this issue of Housing Matters useful. There are details inside about our new Centenary Gardens bungalow development, our Estate Champions and ongoing Fire Safety works.

Just to remind you of closures over the festive period, Medway Council and Mears repairs service will be closed from 5pm on 23 Dec until 8am on 29 Dec and will be closed all day on 2 Jan 2017.

During normal opening times you can report a repair on 01634 333601 or Freephone 0800 0730300. Emergency repairs will be attended as usual, to report emergency repairs phone the Mears 24/7 Repairs Line on 01634 333601 or Freephone 0800 0730300.

Finally I would like to wish you all a happy and safe festive season from myself and everyone in Housing Services.

Tomasz Kozlowski
Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration

There are no “rent free” weeks this year

You will need to make sure you pay your rent in full during the festive season as there will no longer be two “rent free” weeks during this period. All rents have been calculated on a 52-week cycle.

If you are struggling to pay your rent contact your housing officer as soon possible so you can get help and advice.

Housing Officer Duty Line: 01634 333344
Young Person’s Engagement Strategy 2016-2021

Housing Services new Young Person’s Engagement Strategy 2016-2021 was published at the end of August and can be viewed online at www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingpolicies.aspx

Consultation on the strategy was carried out with parents and children that live in Medway Council accommodation and partner organisations that offer support and opportunities to young people in Medway.

The two main themes of the strategy are:

- Inspire young people to tackle their socio economic circumstances by improving the chances they have to achieve academically and enter into employment.
- Reduce the impact of crime on the lives of young people by increasing their opportunities for positive community contribution and enhancing community cohesion.

The strategy has an action plan which is being monitored on a quarterly basis by officers, partner organisations and the parents and young people that helped develop the document.

Residents’ corner

Through the trust, one of our younger residents Tom, who lives with his mum spent a week at Featherby Infant School assisting sports coaches. He has now been accepted for an internship with the trust.

Gillingham Football Club Community Trust are more than happy to support Tom and will assist him with apprenticeship opportunities in the future.

These successes are something to be celebrated and exactly what we want to publish in Housing Matters.

If you or anyone in your household have a story you would like to feature in Housing Matters, please send to tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.

New partnership working opportunities have already come out of the young person’s engagement strategy including work experience placements at Gillingham Football Club Community Trust.
In October 2016 residents moved into our brand new bungalow development called Centenary Gardens.

Centenary Gardens, named as a tribute to the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War, consists of 32 new bungalows. The council has invested over £4m in this exciting development that is reported to be one of the biggest council bungalow projects in the country. Many of the customers moving there were previously under occupying council accommodation and much needed larger homes will be made available as a result.

The new bungalows have been designed to be as open planned as possible and easily adapted to meet the changing physical needs of the residents living in them.

This will reduce the stress the physical environment can have on residents’ daily lives and prevent the need to have disruptive adaptations done to the properties in the future.

Some of the properties have been specifically designed to full wheelchair accessibility standard, with extra wide doors, indoor electric wheel charge points, sinks and hobs that can be lowered and in built white goods that are easily accessible.
Introducing your estate champions

Following our recruitment drive in the last edition of Housing Matters, Housing Services recruited eight volunteers who will give their time for free and become estate champions.

The first estate champion meeting took place on the 28 July 2016 where it was agreed that an estate champion will be a point of contact that can take forward issues and ideas to housing staff on residents’ behalf and feedback information when appropriate.

Champions feed back to Housing Services any concerns you have about estate cleaning, ground maintenance and communal repairs and report repairs needed to your estate. The champions will be at estate inspections if other residents wish to talk to them and will also work on community projects with Housing Services.

Estate champions will have regular contact with Housing Services to address issues on your estates and an action plan based on your issues will be created and addressed at each meeting. The outcomes from these meetings will be reported online and in this magazine.

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Housing Services and our partners will be conducting estate walkabouts throughout the year...

With all the changes in the last few years in relation to the welfare reform, Housing Services would like to talk to our residents to see if there is any support we can offer you and your family.

We feel it’s only right that we come to you; therefore we are conducting estate visits. It will allow us to get to know you a bit better and give you the opportunity to tell us your views or concerns about the area you live in.

We have a questionnaire to complete during the walkabouts that covers a wide range of subjects. It will help us spot any areas where we may be able to offer you more information or assistance that could make you and your families’ life a little easier.

The information you give us will be kept strictly confidential. If we feel you could get assistance from an organisation we will only pass on information with your consent. You are not under any obligation to complete the questionnaire but we feel that doing so could be beneficial to your household. We have already conducted an estate walkabout at Hazlemere Drive and will be going to other areas in the upcoming months.

Some of our estate champions (left to right): John Morgan, Bob Bowring, Jan Welland, Bill Mayo-Bedford, Shirley Griffiths, Mary Butcher and our community development officer Jodie Miller.
More than 1000 homes will be made safer from fire thanks to a partnership between the council and Ventro Group. Works have commenced and will continue up until April 2018, which will see Ventro Group deliver significant internal and communal fire safety improvement work to blocks and associated flats in Gillingham, Twydall and Rainham.

Vento Group
Vento Group is an accredited Fire Door and Passive Fire Protection Contractor, specialising in partnerships with local authorities and housing associations.

“Vento Group are proud to be an extension of the team at Medway Council – it is very exciting to work with such a forward-thinking organisation. Our strong partnership with Medway Council is all about enabling the council to fulfil its main objective; keeping its residents safe.”
What are we doing.....
The schedule of works required to each block will vary but where required we are commonly improving the following:
- Internal fire doors
- Self closing devices
- Mains wired and interlinked smoke detection
- Upgrading flat front doors
- Fire proofing ducting and ventilation
- Means of escape windows
- Common area smoke ventilation
- Electrical and gas meter housing
- Communal doors
- Emergency lighting
- Bin chutes and bin stores
- Windows

Keeping your home safe
We routinely inspect your home whilst undertaking repairs to your home, electrical and gas testing, stock condition surveys and housing officer visits. Since commencing this programme of improvement works we have found that some residents may have removed smoke detectors, or damaged or removed internal fire protection doors. Please be aware that if this is the case then action will be taken which could result in rechargeable works or tenancy enforcement action.

Complaints/compliments and enquiries
If you have had works completed or in the process of having works completed to your home and you wish to discuss the service provided please contact Ventro Group directly on their dedicated line 01752 253277 or email using medway@ventrogroup.com

Smoke alarms
Fires happen when you least expect them, often during the night, spreading very quickly, damaging property, injuring and killing people.

But the real killer is smoke. If you’re asleep when a fire starts and you don’t have a smoke alarm to wake you, you are unlikely to survive. Smoke can suffocate you in just three breaths – you could be dead before the flames reach you.

Reduce the risk of fire in your home
- Fit a smoke alarm on every level of the property
- Make sure internal doors are closed
- Unplug unused electrical equipment
- Put out properly any cigarettes or smoking materials
- Switch off portable heaters and electric blankets
- Do not place lit candles in draughts and put them out when leaving the room

Kent Fire and Rescue Service will be happy to give you free advice on the best approach for your home – Phone: 0800 923 7000 or email: home@kent.fire-uk.org

#FireSafetyFact
Always take care in the kitchen. Cooking appliances caused 50% of accidental fires in 2014/15.

#FireSafetyTip
Create an emergency escape plan to ensure you are prepared should a fire break out.
Make a Smokefree homes pledge

When it’s cold and raining outside, families are less likely to want to go outside and children prefer to play indoors.

Over 80% of cigarette smoke is invisible, meaning you can’t see if your child is inhaling your secondhand smoke or not. Don’t take the risk!

Many Medway parents have chosen to make their home and car smokefree by making a Smokefree Homes Pledge.

By choosing not to smoke around children parents are being positive role models. They are also protecting children from conditions such as asthma, glue ear and bacterial meningitis.

Households in which one or more people smokes are 50% more likely to have a fire.

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are more at risk of suffering from asthma, glue ear and meningitis.

Smoking can permanently age your skin, stain your teeth and increase the risk of quick decay.

If you’d like to make a Smokefree Homes pledge online or for more information visit www.abettermedway.co.uk
Tenant’s responsibilities

Under the terms of your tenancy agreement you are responsible for the following things, if you fail to do so you could be in breach of your tenancy and at risk of eviction.

If you have a front and/or rear garden, you must keep it neat and tidy by cutting the lawn, clearing the weeds, trimming the hedges/shrubs and maintaining trees.

You must keep communal areas clean, tidy and free from obstruction and must not dump any bulky items or household furnishings in communal areas or in the vicinity of your home. Remember fly tipping and dumping waste is illegal and you could face a huge fine.

You must not keep any bulky or unsightly items on your balcony or in your garden and you must not throw any articles from windows or balconies such as litter and cigarette butts.

You need written permission to make certain improvements in your home. If you don’t get this, the council can tell you to return the property to its original condition, or may carry out the work itself and make you pay. Your housing officer will be able to advise if you need written permission. All work carried out will be your responsibility to maintain.

You are responsible for paying your rent on time. The rent is due weekly in advance.

You must pay for repair or replacement if damage is caused to your property deliberately or by neglect, by you, a member of your family, or any other person who is on the premises with your permission.

During 2016 we have had three successful injunctions for anti-social behaviour (ASB) and since April 2014 we have evicted 28 households for either ASB or rent arrears. Please do not let yourself become one of these households.
Tumble dryer risk of fire - safety notices

As reported on the news, there have been a number of incidents where tumble dryers have caught fire, due to manufacturing faults. If you use a tumble dryer, it is strongly recommended to check the details online or ask someone to check for you, to see whether there are any problems with your make/model; check here: https://safety.hotpoint.eu/

Should the machine be affected, register for service and in the meantime, the manufacturer has issued the following advice: “You may continue to use your tumble dryer whilst waiting for the modification, however, we require that you do not leave your dryer unattended during operation as an extra precaution (i.e. do not leave the house or leave the dryer on whilst asleep). Additionally, you should check and clean the filter after every cycle and ensure proper dryer venting, as directed in the original operating manual.”

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.
Focusing on energy

Every saving helps
If you receive both water supply and waste water services from Southern Water, you may qualify for the essentials tariff if your annual water services charges represent at least three per cent* of the total income for your household after deducting tax and housing costs, or you and anyone living with you are in receipt of pension credit.

If you qualify for the essentials tariff you will receive a discount on the charges made to you. If you qualify through pension credit, you will be provided with a 20 per cent discount. Otherwise, the level of discount will be between 20 per cent and 90 per cent, depending on how much of your household income you are spending on the charges.

To help Southern Water establish whether you qualify for the tariff, you must provide them with information about your household income, housing costs, and the number of people living in your home.

If you qualify, help with your charges will start from the date you applied for the essentials tariff. After 12 months you will be contacted to review your circumstances, and to decide whether the essentials tariff should continue for a further 12 months.

*If you only receive water supply services from Southern Water, you may qualify for the Essentials tariff if your annual water supply charges represent at least 1.1 per cent of the total income for your household after deducting tax and housing costs.

Medway switch and save
You can save money on your energy bills by shopping around and comparing energy provider costs. Medway Council has its own tool available for you to do this, visit www.medwayswitchandsave.com to create your own gas and electricity personal projection.

Keep warm and well this winter
The winter months are upon us and at this time of the year it is important that you keep yourself warm.

There are lots of tips on keeping warm on the following websites
www.ageuk.org.uk
www.nhs.uk

Get financial support
There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. View the government publication Keep Warm Keep Well online to learn more www.gov.uk/phe/keep-warm

For more information visit: www.southernwater.co.uk/essentials-tariff or phone the affordability team: 0800 027 0363.
How are we doing?
To keep updated with our latest performance visit www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingperformance.aspx

Estate inspections
Visit 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 contact the housing officer duty line to find out the date of your next estate inspection.

Housing annual report
The 2016 report provides our tenants and leaseholders with an update on our service and how we have performed during the year 2015/16. It also contains the 2016 local offers. To view the report visit www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingpublications/housingannualreport.aspx

New tenants’ welcome pack
View our tenants welcome pack online, www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders.aspx
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.

Tenant meetings and consultation
View our calendar of resident meetings on www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders/haveasayinhousingservices.aspx and phone 01634 333201 for more information and to book a place. Our annual budget meeting with residents will be held on 16 January 2017 2pm to 4pm at Gun Wharf, call now to book a place.

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

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.