Dear resident,

Welcome to this latest edition of Housing Matters, I hope you have all kept safe and warm during the harsh winter weather; we are all looking forward to sunnier times ahead.

We are delighted to announce that in January 2018, Medway Council Landlord Services was shortlisted as a finalist for Landlord of the Year in the 2018 UK Housing Awards. The award ceremony was held on the 2 May and whilst we were not the overall winner, we were still extremely proud to be shortlisted for the award. We feel this nomination acknowledges the vast improvements made to the service over the last five years and we hope you as customers recognise the improvements in the day to day services you receive. More about the award can be found on page 3.

Some residents will be seeing a change in the way they receive their benefits and tax credits as Universal Credit is now being fully rolled out in Medway. Landlord Services realises this can be a challenging time for some residents and wants to support you throughout this process. We are holding several roadshows and drop in sessions where you can get advice and assistance on Universal Credit and any other benefits you receive. Full details on these events can be found on page 8.

In 2017 we conducted our Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR). Over 700 of you responded to the survey and we are really pleased with the results, which can be found on page 4. We realise that there is always room for improvement and page 5 also tells you what we plan to do with your feedback.

April 2018 saw the start of the new three year planned works programme of improvements to your homes and estates. Details of the works due to be undertaken in 2018/19 can be found on page 7 as well as some highlights of last year’s programme.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Housing Matters. If you have any suggestions for future articles or would like to be sent a printed edition, please contact us by email at tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk or phone 01634 333201.

Tomasz Kozlowski
Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration
The UK Housing Awards are the biggest awards in the housing sector and are run by the Chartered Institute of Housing and Inside Housing. The awards showcase the very best the housing sector has to offer. To be nominated for the award is a huge triumph for the service and we’re extremely proud of this achievement. It recognises the vast improvements made to the service over the past five years and our efforts to be a customer focused service.

The award ceremony was held on the 2 May in London and members from Medway Council and Medway Council Landlord Services attended.

So what were we nominated for?

- The community work we undertake including The Big Lunch and our work with Public Health
- The work of the Welfare Reform Team to help people facing financial difficulties
- Our efforts to keep our rent arrears levels consistently low
- The high performing Repairs Service delivered by Mears
- Our work to build new social housing, such as our unique bungalow development at Centenary Gardens

“**We are delighted to be recognised nationally as a good landlord. The fact that we have been shortlisted as finalists in the UK Housing Awards is a testament to our commitment to our tenants.**”

Cllr Howard Doe
Medway Council’s Portfolio Holder for Housing
Thank you to everyone who responded to our Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) last year. Your feedback on our services is vital in helping us make improvements.

There were 730 participants to the survey in total and we have been busy analysing the results. We are extremely happy that 85%* of respondents are satisfied with the overall Landlord Service. *(605/708 respondents)

Here are some key results from the survey:

96% of Homes for Independent Living residents are satisfied with the overall service provided by their Scheme Support Officer

70% of you think Landlord Services gives you the opportunity to make your views known

68% satisfaction with the overall estate services provided

90% of Homes for Independent Living residents are satisfied with the facilities at their scheme

86% satisfaction that your rent provides value for money

78% satisfaction with major works, such as kitchen, bathroom, boiler replacements
Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR)

We’re always looking at ways to keep on improving our services and we’ll be using the STAR results to help us do this. Following the survey, we plan to:

• Hold further consultation meetings with residents that were not satisfied with some aspects of the service to get feedback on ways we can improve
• Benchmark our results to see how they compare against similar organisations
• Conduct a review of our anti-social behaviour service following your feedback
• Create an action plan based on your feedback (covering improvements that we can make to improve customer satisfaction further)
• Develop some local offers based on your responses
• Update you on our progress in future editions of Housing Matters

What are we going to do with your feedback?

85% satisfaction with the overall quality of your home

85% satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service

74% of you think Landlord Services is good at keeping you informed about things that might affect you as a resident

We’re always looking at ways to keep on improving our services and we’ll be using the STAR results to help us do this. Following the survey, we plan to:

• Hold further consultation meetings with residents that were not satisfied with some aspects of the service to get feedback on ways we can improve
• Benchmark our results to see how they compare against similar organisations
• Conduct a review of our anti-social behaviour service following your feedback
• Create an action plan based on your feedback (covering improvements that we can make to improve customer satisfaction further)
• Develop some local offers based on your responses
• Update you on our progress in future editions of Housing Matters
Landlord Services continuously invest money into your homes to make them safe and comfortable places for you to live.

**What we achieved in 2017/18**

- **547** CO detectors installs
- **55** Roof replacements
- **676** Electrical Tests
- **52** Smoke detector installs
- **50** Full property re-wires -
- **110** Bathrooms
- **105** Doors
- **154** Boilers
- **78** Kitchens

100% of customers surveyed were satisfied with the service they received

82% thought the service was excellent
2018/19 Capital Works Programme

The year ahead is another exciting one, with capital investment of over £4million to go towards planned and major works across our housing stock.

This includes installing:
- 123 Kitchens
- 200 Bathrooms
- 150 Boilers
- 40 Pitched roofs replacements
- 85 Full property re-wires
- 160 Doors

This year will also see us upgrading and repairing all of our HRA owned street lights.

The communal fire alarm and smoke detection systems in our Homes for Independent Living Schemes will be upgraded over the next three years, starting in 2018/19. This year we will also be upgrading the scheme boiler at Suffolk Court, Rainham.

Fire risk assessments works programme

As part of our ongoing programme of fire risk assessment works, an investment of more than £2.5million saw further significant improvements made to hundreds of homes during 2017/18.

These works included; replacement fire front doors, fire rated internal doors, increased smoke detection and heat detection, installation of dry risers and installation of automatic opening vents in common staircases. The investment further provides support for residents safety.

Garages

Buttermere Close garages benefitted from a programme of investment including:
- Garages repaired and painted
- We demolished a section of unused garages to provide local residents with much needed parking

Garages at Cross Street, Gillingham were re-built as part of a regeneration project, with replacement doors and a new roof too.

Looking to the future

Following the success of a recent trial, Medway will be looking to further extend its programme of remote self-testing communal lighting. This prevents the needs for physical inspection which reduces maintenance costs and allows us to re-invest those savings on estate improvements to your area.

External Walls will be inspected throughout 2018/19 to ensure that they are safe and in good order.
Meet the Welfare Reform Team

Landlord Services Welfare Reform Team is here to help you with benefits, budgeting or managing your finances. The team are available to help with all your benefit questions and one of their current focuses is supporting residents going onto Universal Credit.

Marie Booker
Welfare Reform Officer
Hi I am Marie - I have been working at Medway Council for almost 15 years. Just over 11 of those years have been with Medway revenues and benefits as a Housing Benefit Assessor. I came to work in Housing as a Welfare Reform Officer in October 2015 as I wanted to help people in more depth with claiming benefits, maximising their income and sustainment of their tenancies.

Abigail Daniels
Welfare Reform Officer
Hi I’m Abigail and I’ve have been supporting people with health, welfare and social issues for the last 18 years. After joining Medway Council in 2017, the first thing I wanted to do was start a Welfare Reform Drop in.

Michael Opreshko
Income Manager
Hello I’m Michael and I manage the Income Officers and Welfare Reform Team who provide support, advice and information to assist in all aspects of arrears and debt management related to tenants and leaseholder.

For support in completing your application (including an instructional video), plus for more details on what Universal Credit means for you, visit medway.gov.uk/universalcredit

Drop in sessions and roadshows

The Welfare Reform Team hold weekly drop in sessions at Twydall Library on alternate Wednesdays, 10am to 12noon and Thursday afternoons, 1 to 4pm. No appointments needed, just come along, visit medway.gov.uk/universalcredit for more details.

You can also come to our Universal Credit roadshows: The best way to prepare for Universal Credit and receive advice on how to process your application.

• Friday, 13 July, 1.30 to 3pm at Medway Adult Education Centre, Green Street, Gillingham
• Wednesday, 15 August 11am to 12.30pm at Twydall Evangelical Church, Goudhurst road
• Thursday, 16 August 11am to 12.30pm at Mountevans House, Skinner street
• Friday, 17 August 11am to 12.30pm Suffolk Court, Suffolk Avenue
Leaseholder Section

Leaseholder drop in sessions

Our drop-in surgeries allow leaseholders the opportunity to discuss areas of concern with the Home Ownerships Officer and speak with repair staff and housing officers via a phone call. No appointments are needed.

The surgeries are available on the following dates: Drop by and speak to the team:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 19 July</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Twydall Hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 20 August</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Gillingham Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 18 September</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Rainham Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 11 October</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Twydall Hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 19 November</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Gillingham Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 4 December</td>
<td>10am to 12noon</td>
<td>Rainham Library</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Property alterations

If you are a leaseholder or resident of Medway Council and you are planning on doing structural alterations to your property, you need to obtain written permission from Landlord Services prior to conducting any works. Structural alterations include installing new bathrooms and kitchens, moving internal doors or accessing loft spaces.

You can download a property alteration form on our website: www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/91/leaseholder_information/3

Alternatively phone the Officer Duty line on 01634 333344 to request a form.

Annual gas service

Leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that any gas appliances in your property are properly maintained. If you sub-let your property, you are legally required to carry out annual gas safety checks. Leaseholders can book a gas service with our responsive repairs contractor Mears, who are Gas Safe registered. Any service carried out is completely separate from the terms and conditions of your lease and you will need to pay the contractor directly; Medway Council will have no involvement.

To book an annual gas service appointment, phone Mears on 0800 0730300. The cost for the Gas Service will be £70 and it must be paid in cash or cheque on the day of the service.
Digital training

Our Community Development Team visited the Homes for Independent Living Schemes in March to support residents who were having problems using their electronic devices. The team attended the schemes coffee mornings and helped residents set up emails and access social media.

Annual Quiz

The eighth Homes for Independent Living annual quiz was held in December 2017 at the Rainham Social Club.

Seven schemes participated in total and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves including the staff that helped facilitate the event. Huge thanks to Norse who kindly provided transportation from each scheme to the Rainham Social Club at a reduced rate. Woodchurch House were the winners of this year’s annual quiz for the second year running. Second place went to Suffolk Court, with Longford Court in third place. The wooden spoon went to Esmonde House.

Dementia Carers Friendship Group

We meet every Friday from 10am to 1.30pm in the lounge at Marlborough House, High Street, Rainham ME8 8AF. Join us for a cuppa, a chat and a light lunch at midday. You will be able to meet people who are in, or have been in a similar situation to you, and share hints and tips with them. You will be sure of a friendly, warm reception. For more information contact: David Royle on 01634 377254 or Roy Ansell on 01634 230331.
A reminder for Homes for Independent Living residents

Landlord Services want your homes to be a comfortable, safe and pleasant place for you to live and for your family and friends to visit. To ensure this is possible, we ask you to adhere to the rules set out in your tenancy agreement and be thoughtful towards other residents. Residents will be in breach of their tenancy if they do anything that interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of others.

Take a look at our checklist below:

- Your scheme car park is only for the use of scheme residents that own cars and people that visit you at the scheme. Do not give anyone else permission to park at the scheme.

- Communal facilities provided by Medway Council should be respected and not damaged.

- The communal laundry room is for resident use only; visitors are not permitted to do their own washing in the communal laundry room.

- The scheme lounge and kitchen is available for everyone to use and enjoy, but please make sure you leave the facilities clean and tidy after use. Importantly the communal cooker is only permitted for use when the Scheme Support Officer is on-site at the scheme.

- You must not have more people living in your home than the maximum number allowed. There are six guest rooms across our eight schemes available for visitors to use for a small charge; please speak to your Scheme Support Officer if you would like to use a guest room.

- You are responsible for the safety and security of the scheme you live in, this cannot be policed. Do not let anyone you don’t know into the building. If you struggle with this please speak to your Scheme Support Officer.

- Only small caged birds, fish and care dogs are allowed to be kept in the schemes and you must obtain written agreement from the Housing Management Team before you keep any of these pets.

- Please dress appropriately in communal areas.

- Fire safety

  - In accordance with Medway Council Policy and Fire Safety Regulations you must not store items in communal areas. Storage for scooters is provided in designated storage areas. If for any reason you bring your scooter into the building, it must be returned to the designated area immediately after use. The Mobility Scooter Storage policy is available on our website.

  - You must ensure your flat door is kept closed and not propped open; regular checks are carried out to make sure you adhere to this policy.

  - Chip pans and candles are well known for being a fire hazard; ideally we ask you to not use these items in your home for your own safety.

Please remember the Scheme Support Officers are there to support you and help you live independently; if you are having any problems, please do not hesitate to talk to them.
Hi - we are your Estate Champions that represent Medway Council residents at monthly meetings and various consultation events. If you have any concerns or questions about the service you receive from Medway Council Landlord Services, Mears (repairs and maintenance) or Norse (estate cleaning and grounds maintenance) then please feel free to approach us or email: tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk with your contact details and we will make contact with you.

Meet the team:
Mrs Mary Butcher - Blean Road/Twydall
Mr Eric Slater - Hazlemere Drive Gillingham
Mr John Morgan - Middle Street Brompton
Mr Bill Mayo Bedford - High Street Brompton
Mr Mick Falkner - Saunders Street Gillingham
Mr Robert Jefford - Skinner Street Gillingham

Alternatively you can phone the Community Development Officer on 01634 333201 who will put you in contact with us and answer any questions you have about the champion role. If you would like to become an Estate Champion for your area please phone the Community Development Officer.

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 111999 and report the suspected leak.
Working in Partnership

Medway Council Landlord Services work in partnership with Youth Services, The Community Safety Partnership Team and The Medway Sporting Legacy Team. Together we have put on some fantastic youth and sports events over the last year, delivered in and around Medway Council estates. In October half term we held a joint event at the cages on James Street and Saunders Street that involved sports activities including boxing and tag archery. This model of working has been so hugely successful that Youth Services secured funding to roll out the programme across Medway for all residents to engage with the service and have fun for free. These events have since been put on at Gillingham Park, Cozington Park and continue at James Street and Saunders Street.

Fire risks

Landlord Services takes your safety extremely seriously. For this reason we do not allow residents to store or leave anything in communal areas of buildings which include balconies and stairwells, as they cause fire and trip hazards.

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.

Following the completion of a three year programme of Fire Risk Assessment work improvements, we will be doing further Fire Risk Assessment surveys at our estates over the coming months. We politely ask residents to cooperate with this process as they are being done to ensure your safety.

Garage Lettings

Did you know - Medway Council owns just under 600 garages in Gillingham, Rainham and Twydall. You do not have to be a council tenant to rent a garage. All garages let from April 2018 will cost £9.41 for council tenants and £9.41+ VAT for non-council tenants.

If you would like to rent a garage visit www.medway.gov.uk/info/200151/housing_advice/105/renting_a_garage/1 or phone the Housing Officer Duty Line 01634 333344

Our Garage Lettings policy can be found at www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/download/180/housing_policies
How to dispose of your bulky waste responsibly

Bulky refuse collection

Medway Council collects your domestic waste and recycling every week. As a system, it works pretty well; every week we cater for 113,000 homes without a hiccup, dealing with almost 100,000 tonnes of refuse and recycling over the course of a year.

All you need to do is put it in the appropriate sacks and use the facilities provided. Bulky refuse however is a different matter and needs to be booked in advance. This can be done by phoning Medway Council’s Customer Contact on 01634 333333 or book online at www.medway.gov.uk/bulkywaste

Book a collection

A standard collection costs £21

An express collection (so your items are collected quicker) costs £36.

To book phone: 01634 333333

Bookings must be made by 4pm to allow us to process the collection. Please phone us no later than 3.30pm to finish the booking in time for the 4pm deadline.

What you need to know:

• You can select up to three items for us to take per collection.

• We don’t accept any items with glass (e.g. cabinets, mirrors, wardrobes, doors).

• Items must be left outside the front of your property at the nearest point to the highway by 7am on the day of collection.

• We will only collect from the ground floor.

• Fridge and Freezers must be empty of all food waste prior to collection as these items will not be collected if they contain food.

Please donate your reusable items to charity

Charities are always looking for good quality bedroom and living room furniture like beds, wardrobes, tables and chairs.

Neighbourhood Furniture Store 01795 478550 - Abacus Furniture Project 01634 296662
Don’t Fly Tip!

If you leave your bulky items on the landing, by the bin store, or anywhere else without booking them in for collection, you could be prosecuted for fly tipping.

This is an offence which attracts a fine at magistrates’ court. Fines tend to be between £500 - £2,000 depending on the case, but could be anything up to £50,000.

In most low level cases though, it can be dealt with by a £400 fixed penalty.

Further Information

If you need to get rid of any household waste before your collection day, you can dispose of it for free at one of our three Household Waste and Recycling Centres. They’re located at Ambley Road Gillingham, Shawstead Road Chatham and Sundridge Hill Cuxton.

If you would like further information on refuse and recycling, please visit medway.gov.uk/binsrubbishandrecycling

Reporting

If you have information about anyone you suspect to be fly tipping, please phone 01634 333333 and ask to speak to the Environmental Enforcement Team in confidence.
Useful contacts

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

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

Repairs freephone number including out of hours emergencies:
0800 0730300

Welfare Reform Team freephone:
0800 4088080

Housing Officer Duty Line:
01634 333344

Community Development:
01634 333201

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

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

Performance Matters
www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/
download/318/housing_
performance_and_annual_reports

Estate inspections
www.medway.gov.uk/directory/32/
estate_inspections

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.

Do not respond to cold callers
If you’re 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 - phone 01634 333 333 or email consumer.protection@medway.gov.uk

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.