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ANNUAL REPORT 2021

We are pleased to present the 2020/21 Annual Report to our tenants and leaseholders – please see attached. We would like to thank everyone who completed the survey on what we should include in this year's report and hope you find it relevant and informative. An accessible version can also be accessed [here](#).

HFIL FORUM

Following a break of over a year, the Homes for Independent Living (HFIL) Forum has been able to resume! This meeting was held in September at Woodchurch House, with tenant representatives from across the schemes present to discuss matters of their schemes. Tenants were gifted tea, coffee and biscuits to take back to their schemes and share with other residents.



ESTATE CHAMPION MEETING

Since the easing of restrictions earlier in the year we have held our second Estate Champions meeting in September. At our latest meeting we had representatives from Mears, Estate Services and the tenancy team along with our estate champions. To find out more about what was discussed and our actions from the meeting, have a look at our [action plan](#).

The next meeting will take place on Monday 6th December. Those who cannot attend in person are able to video call into the meeting!

Are you interested in representing your estate? Get involved or tell us what you think by emailing tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk.

SCRUTINY WEEK - WHAT YOU SAID

During September's Scrutiny Week, we put out questions for you on our Facebook page. Thank you to those who shared their views with us. You can see some of them below:

WE ASKED

Should we have a closed Facebook group for Medway Housing tenants?



What should we call the Facebook group?



How can we better communication with our tenants?



What do you feel we are doing right in communicating with our tenants?



YOU SAID

Yes, that's a great idea. I would get involved!

Medway Housing Tenants Group. Belonging to the tenants/ Medway Housing Co-Operative

Information corner in library/ community centre with post box for tenant to housing department as some tenants don't have computer access or don't like attending meetings.

Keeping them aware of new housing; what our contractors are doing regarding repairs and voids.

As a result of your feedback, we'll be starting a new Facebook group for Medway Housing tenants. Keep your eyes peeled for the next newsletter - we'll invite you to join it!

COMPLIANCE UPDATE - ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKS

We have a legal obligation to ensure the electrical installation in your property is safe. It is recommended that an (EICR) Electrical Installation Condition Report is carried out every 5 years, this helps to keep you, your family and neighbours safe.

The test can take between 2-4 hours to complete, we will check to make sure there is no deterioration to cabling or to any switches or sockets. We will replace any broken accessories and repair any faults that we may find, this is to make sure that your home is safe for continued use. We will also check to see if your smoke detectors are present and are in working order.

A letter will be sent to you confirming the date when your electrical safety check is due. If the appointment is not convenient, you must contact our repairs provider as soon as possible so that we can rearrange your appointment.

Missed appointments

If you fail to provide access to your home for us to carry out your electrical safety check, for example by missing your appointment or failing to give us sufficient notice that you won't be in, we will take all available steps in order for us to meet our legal obligations. This may involve taking formal and legal action against you allowing us to gain access to your property

Communal areas

We will also test all our electrical equipment in communal areas, this can be small stair ways with just a few lights to our larger more complex sheltered communal areas. This is makes sure that all our buildings are well maintained and safe for continued use.

Electrical safety tips

As we move into the colder months, there is generally an increase in the use of electricity, look at what appliances you are using and what they are plugged into, as a rule don't plug anything with a heating element into an extension cable e.g. toaster, kettle, heater, microwave, washing machine, tumble drier etc as it is easy to overload the wall socket causing it to overheat and possibly cause a fire. There are simple steps you can take to keep you and your family safe.

- Don't plug too many appliances into electrical sockets. You can use this easy online calculator to check if you're overloading your sockets. Just click and drag the electrical items to plug them into the socket – the calculator will tell you if it's safe or warn you if it's overloaded.
- Don't plug an extension lead into another extension lead as this can cause overloading. If you need additional sockets, contact our repairs provider for a quote under the 'handyman' service.
- Don't use electrical appliances in the UK that were made to be used in other countries. They might operate at a different voltage, so they could overheat the plug or cable.
- When you buy an electrical appliance, check it has a CE mark. This shows that the appliance meets European safety standards.
- Don't repair damaged electrical wiring or appliances yourself.
- Don't take mains-powered electrical items into the bathroom.
- Don't touch electrical appliances or switches with wet hands.
- Don't plug adaptors into other adaptors.
- Don't store personal items in or in front of electricity meter cupboards.

- Before you buy a second-hand appliance, we recommend you check that: - a qualified electrician has run safety checks on it - the manufacturer hasn't issued a safety recall for it

Check regularly for the following danger signs:

- A smell of hot plastic or burning near an appliance or socket
- Sparks or smoke coming from a plug or appliance
- Blackness or scorch marks around a socket or plug, or on an appliance
- Damaged or frayed leads
- coloured wire inside leads showing at the plug or anywhere else
- Melted plastic on appliance casings or leads
- Fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that operate for no obvious reason Check that the insulation on the cable goes fully into the plug and that the internal wires are not visible.

DEALING WITH CONDENSATION AND MOULD

Condensation is arguably the most common form of dampness and can eventually lead to the growth of black mould. It forms on internal surfaces when the temperature drops sufficiently below the temperature of moist air inside the property. You should watch out for it because if left to develop, condensation can lead to an unsightly, musty property. More importantly, it can also aggravate or trigger health problems such as asthma and wider complaints. [Click here](#) to read our guide on dealing with condensation and mould.

CHANGES TO UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Are you ready for the Reduction in your Universal Credit Personal Allowance this Autumn? In April 2020 in response to the Covid pandemic, Universal Credit increased all Personal Allowances by £20 per week. The scheme officially ends on 6 October 2021. However, the exact date the money will stop being paid will vary depending on the day you usually receive Universal Credit.

For some people, this will mean the last payment at the higher rate would have been at the end of September and for others at the beginning of October 2021.

The New Adult Personal Allowances are:

Single age under 25: £257.33 per month

Single age over 25: £324.84 per month

Couple both under 25: £403.93 per month

Couple both over 25: £509.91 per month

This is the maximum you may receive, however if you have deductions from your benefit then these amounts can be up to 25% lower. Now is the time to adjust your budget and assess your expenses before the winter bills arrive.

- It may be a good time to review other bills like Energy, Broadband and Mobile phone contracts. Checkout: www.uswitch.com for up to date offers and deals or download the App.

- The Warm Home Discount is a government scheme which helps with a one-off payment of up to £140 discount towards electricity bills that energy suppliers provide between October and March. Contact the helpline on 0800 731 0214, or go to the website: www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme.
- Plan ahead for Christmas, Citizens advice have provided a useful guide https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/global/migrated_documents/corporate/top-ten-tips-for-christmas.pdf
- For more help with living on a budget you can visit <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/everyday-money/budgeting/living-on-a-low-income-tips?source=mas#>
- For more information, please contact 01634 333344 and ask for the Tenancy Sustainment Team or email welfarereform@medway.gov.uk.

NET ZERO WEEK

Join Tpas for a week of virtual events to find the answers to our sustainability and Net Zero challenges, looking at how residents and landlords can help the planet together.

During this week Tpas will showcase residents, housing professionals and sector experts as they seek to explore all the possible actions we can take to meet the Net Zero agenda. We will hear some examples of what's gone well so far for those who have started on this journey. And what's not gone so well. By sharing our experiences we can learn and improve our actions together. As we are members of Tpas, you have access to a range of free sessions during Net Zero Week. [Click here](#) to see them!



FITFIX FOR 13-17 YEAR OLDS

Fitfix is a healthy lifestyle course for teenagers that helps them learn about healthy habits and build body confidence. They will also receive a free fitness tracker and a free gym membership! The course starts Wednesday, 6 October at MidKent College. [Click here](#) to book now.

TRI FOR YOU - STARTING SOON!

Our Tri For You groups help children build healthy habits through fun interactive sessions. Little ones learn about healthy food through play, story time and crafts while older children explore topics like positive body image, what's in our food and cravings. We offer:

- TriTots for 2-4 year-olds
- TriMini for 5-7 year-olds
- TriClub for 8-12 year-olds

[Click here](#) for more info or to join.

STOP SMOKING THIS STOPTOBER

Did you know that if you make it to 28 days smoke-free you are 5 times more likely to quit for good? That's why thousands of people will make a quit attempt this Stoptober. There's lots of local support in Medway to help you quit. Get in touch and one of our advisors we will help find the right support for you. We offer:

- One-to-one support, either on the telephone, face-to-face or over video link
- Text to quit. Get support, tips and even vouchers for prescriptions to your phone

[Find out more here.](#)

YOUR NHS HEALTH CHECK

Many age-related health problems can be dealt with by early diagnosis and making simple lifestyle changes. If you're aged 40 to 74 years old you may be eligible for a free NHS health check. Getting a check will spot any issues early on – peace of mind for you and a great way to support the NHS and save resources. You can book a check through our booking team. Phone 01634 335830, email medwayhealthchecks@medway.gov.uk or text the word 'CHECK' to 81066.

MEDWAY REMAKERY

Medway Remakery is launching soon! Our resident tutor makers will be appearing at various Medway venues. They will deliver a range of pop up workshops which focus on our common desire to share skills and generate environmental impact. Let us share a wealth of expertise to mend, reuse, recycle and upcycle. More information on workshop dates will follow but look forward to the world of recrafting! We can all learn new skills, have fun with creativity and make beautiful, useful items from things destined for landfill.

WORKSHOPS AT GILLINGHAM LIBRARY



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'ANIME MAGIC'

MUSIC MAKING & ANIME DRAWING WORKSHOPS WITH 2A-LTY

Learn how to draw an anime character ♦ Create your own Gillingham Superhero
Make magic music inspired by Studio Ghibli Movies' Classic Soundtracks and more...

Saturday 28 August: Music 3–4pm / Anime Illustration 4–5pm
Saturday 4 September: Music 2–3pm / Anime Illustration 3–4pm
Saturday 11 September: Music 2–3pm / Anime Illustration 3–4pm

**'TEXTURE' FAMILY DRAWING WORKSHOPS
WITH KAREN SCUDDER**

Use texture and pattern to add interest to your drawing! Karen will show you ways to create texture using a variety of materials, experimenting with different effects including wax resist, crumpling, cutting, rubbing and mark-making. Suitable for families and young people aged 4–11 years.

Saturday 16 October: 10–11am / 11.30am–2.30pm
Wednesday 27 October: 1.30–2.30pm / 3–4pm

**'MANGA, DICKENS AND THE GHOST OF WRITINGS PAST'
WITH SAM HALL FROM WORDSMITHERY**

Based on her experience of adapting her play into a graphic novel, Sam Hall will talk about how writing a graphic strip differs from longer form writing. Followed by a workshop on creating a basic one-page illustrated story on a spooky Halloween theme. Suitable for adults and young people aged 14+.

Saturday 30 October: 2–4pm

For bookings contact: Gillingham Library, 3 High Street, Gillingham ME7 1BG
Tel: 01634 337 799 ♦ Email: gillingham.library@medway.gov.uk

BETTER CONNECTED

Better Connected is a service that helps people aged 65+ in Medway who are struggling with loneliness or isolation.

We offer:

- Help from a trained link worker
- Personalised support tailored to you
- Sessions provided face-to-face, online or over the phone

[Click here](#) to find out more or call 01634 333 013.

SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER - EXPLAINED

TPAS have produced a short, informative video guide about the new Social Housing White Paper - a Charter For Social Housing Residents and what this means for residents.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2BWsrpPFFA&t=11s>

BEWARE OF LOAN SHARKS

Please be wary of loan sharks. These illegal lenders will often appear as a friendly and easy way of borrowing money – however this very quickly changes.

Loan sharks often:

- Offer you a cash loan but do not give you any paperwork
- Take your benefit or bank card as security on the loan
- Do not tell you when you will finish paying
- Increase the amount you owe, even if you are making regular payments
- Use threatening language or violence to get money from you

If you think you have borrowed from a loan shark, call the England Illegal Money Lending Team hotline and talk to them in complete confidence. The team can discuss any concerns you may have and will give information and offer advice on your individual situation. They help people to make sense of what is happening and will explain choices you can make to help you take back control from the loan shark.

If you have borrowed money from a loan shark you have not broken the law – they have. If you are worried about this, call the confidential number below. Telephone: 0300 555 2222 Text: 07860 022116 with your message Email: reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk Report a loan shark online at stoploansharks.co.uk