

April 2022



# TENANT NEWS

## In this issue:

The results  
from our tenant  
survey

How you can  
get involved

Helpful tenancy  
advice

...and more!



### Have you updated your rent account with Universal Credit?

Your rent increased on 4 April 2022. If you receive Universal Credit, this means you need to log onto your Universal Credit journal to-do list and complete the 'Confirm Housing Costs'. First update your rent and then update your eligible service charges (if you have any), using the Rent Variation Notice you received in March.

Many tenants get into unknown rent arrears due to not completing this task in the to-do list and therefore receiving less money than they are entitled to. Please check to make sure this isn't happening to you.

If you need help understanding this or updating your housing costs correctly, please contact our Income Recovery Officers or one of our Benefits and Money Advisors on either **01227 862 530** or **01227 862 294**.

Please also be aware that your tenancy agreement says you need to pay your rent in advance, not in arrears. Get in touch on **01227 862 142** if you want to discuss this, or contact your Income Recovery Officer directly to arrange repayment.

### Preventing scams

Since the start of the pandemic there has been an increase in scams. The government's Joint Fraud Taskforce found that eight out of 10 UK adults had received a scam text in the last three months and landline call scams continued to be a threat for older people, with almost two thirds of all over-75s saying they had received a potential scam call.

These are ways you can help protect yourself from being scammed.

**STOP** – scammers will attempt to trick you into giving away your personal or bank details. Always be wary of letters, emails, texts or phone calls that promise you money or a refund.

**CHECK** – has the sender spelled your name correctly and are there any grammatical mistakes? You should also check the sender details, either number or email address. If you are concerned, go straight to the providers' website and speak to them directly.

**ASK** – If you're ever unsure about a communication you've received, it's always best to ask someone – perhaps a friend or trusted advisor.

### Cracking down on anti-social behaviour

Our Tenancy Enforcement team works closely with the council's Legal team and with the police to deal with serious anti-social behaviour. The enforcement team can submit a disclosure to the police to provide evidence of criminal offences which we can use in order to take tenancy action under the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

If you, or anyone who lives with you, commits a crime you could end up losing your home. Because this is a breach of your tenancy agreement, you would be classed as having made yourself intentionally

homeless and the council would not necessarily have to rehouse you.

**Serious crime could include, among other things:**

- harassment
- racist or religious abuse
- using, growing or selling drugs

#### Case study

Tenant X committed burglaries in the vicinity. They were convicted for 3 offences and went to prison. The council served a mandatory notice on the tenant, the court granted us outright possession of their home and the tenant has now been evicted.

# You gave us your views

Over 1,000 tenants and leaseholders took part in the survey in summer 2021 and you told us what you thought about the housing service you have received over the past 12 months. We want to thank those that took part in this survey. Your feedback is important to us as it helps shape how we run the housing service.



## HOME AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

**Overall quality of home:** 77.7% of respondents are satisfied to some extent with the quality of their home

**Dealing with repairs and maintenance:** 66.5% of respondents are satisfied to some extent with how the council deals with repairs and maintenance.

## COMMUNICATION

**How easy the housing team is to deal with:** 57.6% of respondents are either very or fairly satisfied that the team is easy to deal with.

**How good the council is at keeping residents informed:** 64.2% of respondents think the council is very or fairly good at keeping them informed about things that might affect them as a tenant.

## OVERALL SERVICE

**Satisfaction with the housing service:** 71.4% of respondents are very or fairly satisfied with the housing service provided by the council.

## You said we did

**You said** Litter, rubbish and fly tipping is the biggest problem you experience on estates

**We will** Reinstate clean-up days to help clear estates.

**You said** Dealing with repairs and maintenance is tenants' top priority for us to improve on

**We will** Review complaints received about the repairs service, plus satisfaction data from contractor surveys, to identify specific reasons for dissatisfaction and address these with the contractors

**You said** Dealing with anti-social behaviour is tenant's second highest priority for us to improve us

**We will** Analyse actions taken in response to anti-social behaviour complaints and use tenant newsletters to feed back to residents on this

**You said** Tenants with internet access find it less easy to deal with the housing team than those who do not have internet access

**We will** Explore how we can better use online methods to communicate with residents and enable them to find the information they need themselves

**You said** Overall, younger tenants are less satisfied with the housing service than older residents and fewer young people responded to the survey

**We will** Undertake some targeted work with younger tenants to find out why they are less satisfied and the best ways of engaging with them

**You said** Tenants in maisonettes feel less safe in their homes than those in other property types

**We will** Undertake some targeted work with tenants in maisonettes to understand why they are dissatisfied

**You said** 23.5% of respondents do not feel the council listens to their views and acts on them

**We will** Analyse actions taken in response to complaints and use tenant newsletters to feed back to residents on this





# Repairs

There are many repairs and small jobs you can ask our contractors to carry out. However, if the repair is your responsibility, you will be charged for it. It's best to check with our staff if the repair is your responsibility or not.

If it is your responsibility, Mears will be happy to carry out any work but it is likely to cost more than a local company would charge. So we recommend you get a few quotes from companies for the work to be done before deciding who to use.

If you would like a full copy of your responsibilities as a tenant, please email **getinvolved@canterbury.gov.uk** or call **07597 528 428**. We will then send you a copy of the Tenant Handbook.

## TOP REPAIR JOBS TENANTS ARE CHARGED FOR



### BROKEN WINDOWS

Any broken windows are your responsibility. Please check the ground before mowing your grass, as it can be costly if you happen to go over a stone which flicks and smashes a window. We saw an increase in tenants asking for windows to be replaced over the summer months because of this. Replacing a window can cost anywhere between £100 to £500 and will be charged back to you.



### LOCKED OUT OF YOUR HOME

It is your responsibility to pay for replacement keys and locks, so if you do call the council and ask us for help, we will charge you for the work. It may be a good idea to leave a key with a trusted friend or family member, or install a key safe which will be much cheaper than paying for a locksmith.



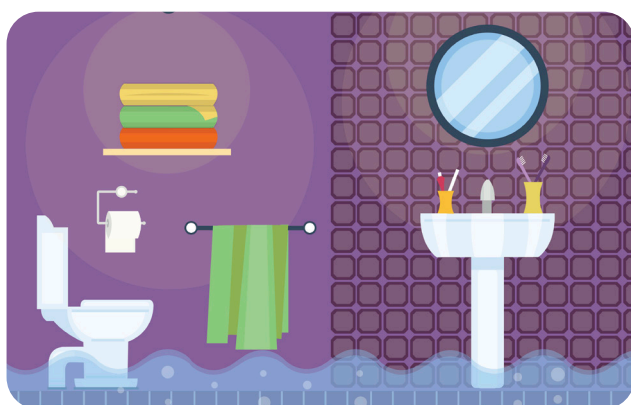
### BLOCKED DRAINS

This is the most common request we get. If we have to send a contractor to visit, it will mean you will need to cover the cost, unless it is a problem with the fitting. Before you call us, try using on-the-shelf products from your local supermarket - they are much cheaper than paying a contractor and are usually very good at clearing most blockages.

# YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A TENANT

REPAIR	YOU	US	EXCEPTIONS
<b>Inside</b>			
Door fitting and fixtures	✓		
Locks	✓		
Maintaining carpet and furniture	✓		
Repairing built in cupboards and renewing kitchen doors	✓		We will replace kitchens due to reasonable fair wear and tear, in line with our planned work programme
Clearing blockages to toilets, sinks and showers	✓		We will help if there is a fault with the system or fixtures
<b>Outside</b>			
Repairing and maintaining fencing	✓		Except where the fence is next to a public footpath or road
Repairing and maintaining rear garden paths	✓		Except in shared areas
Structure of the building, including walls, roof, outside drains		✓	
Patios and paving	✓		

## Contents insurance



Whether you have just moved into your home or been there for a while, and whether you live in a flat, house or sheltered accommodation, home contents insurance is a must.

You do not need to arrange buildings insurance as this is done by the council and covered by the rent you pay. But it is down to you to arrange contents insurance.

Providing cover for furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments, it gives you peace of mind if the worst should happen. It sounds dramatic, but if your washing machine was to leak and ruin your flooring, or if the flat upstairs flooded and damaged your furniture and wallpaper, could you afford to replace, repair or redecorate?

We strongly recommend you take out home contents insurance that will cover you against damage to your personal belongings and other household contents and decoration. You should also check that your insurance covers you for lost keys and break-ins.

There are many companies you can use for insurance, it is best to get a few quotes from different providers and go with the one that best suits your needs.

### Improve your health and wellbeing

ASPIRE is a free programme aimed at helping people improve their health and wellbeing and get into work.

The east Kent hub is based in Aylesham and offers a wide range of activities including cooking, gardening, beekeeping and lots more.

To find out more, contact ASPIRE at [aspire@bechange.org.uk](mailto:aspire@bechange.org.uk) or on **01304 840 134**.

### New messaging service from Kent Police

My Community Voice is an online messaging service that helps Kent and Medway residents, businesses, and community groups to keep in touch with their local policing teams. The service sends updates about your local area directly from the police officers themselves.

My Community Voice is more than just a messaging service; it allows you to reply to the alerts we send you, share information and tell us about the issues affecting you.

Sign up to receive alerts at [mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk](http://mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk)

### Become a digital champion

Kent County Council is working on a project to eliminate digital exclusion. A key part of the project includes recruiting a team of digital champions, whose role will be to support their local communities with digital skills and awareness.

Digital champions are volunteers. You don't have to be a technical genius to be one, but you will have patience and understanding and be a strong communicator.

As a digital champion, you could be:

- helping someone set up an email account or send emails
- showing someone how to access public services online
- helping someone use an online GP booking service
- explaining the benefits of being online (such as shopping and banking)
- setting someone up on Zoom or Microsoft Teams
- showing someone how to use their phone, tablet, laptop or other digital equipment (such as Amazon Alexa)

Kent County Council also offers digital skills workshops and training to help people learn how to use digital technology and build their confidence.

To find out more about what is involved in becoming a digital champion or the other services Kent County Council can offer, visit the Digital Kent website at [digitalkent.uk](http://digitalkent.uk) or contact **Jake Huggett**, Engagement Officer (Digital Inclusion and Capability) at [jake.huggett@kent.gov.uk](mailto:jake.huggett@kent.gov.uk) or on **03000 416 279**.

### Important survey of all your homes

We want to make sure we have the most accurate and up-to-date information about our housing so that all the work necessary is given the correct priority during future years.

The information collected will also help us to look at energy levels and how we can work towards reducing carbon emissions over the coming decade. We have been knocking on many of your doors over the last months recently while we undertake

an important survey of the condition of all your homes. Tenants have been contacted in advance with appointment dates and a big thank you to all those who have made it easy for surveyors to come round and make their checks.

Don't worry if we haven't yet been in touch with you about this - it will take us many months to visit all the 5,000 homes we manage. We will contact you when we are due to visit you.

## Fire safety in communal areas

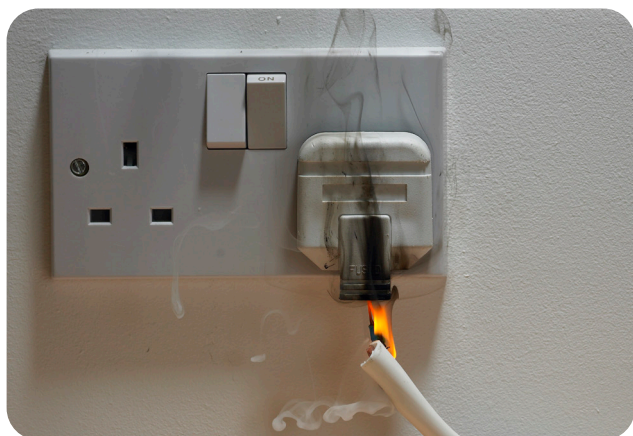
While we do everything we can to make the place where you live as safe as possible, there is always the small risk of a fire breaking out.

If there is a fire, our first and most important job is to keep you safe. That is why our teams are in the process of clearing belongings from communal areas or shared spaces in our blocks.

We understand this may cause some upset for you, but the law states we need to move the items from communal areas (Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005) and this is very important to us.

Please help us keep you safe by removing any of your items from communal areas.

If you need any help or advice on this, please contact the housing team on **01227 862 142**, or speak to your Independent Living Manager if you live in sheltered housing.



## Fire doors

We are reviewing all our fire doors to make sure they meet the rules of the Fire Safety Act 2021. As part of this, we will be adding labels to fire doors in buildings and this might include front doors to individual flats within the buildings. If you see these labels please do not remove them as they are there for everyone's safety.

There should be no disruption to your door or building as a result of this work.



## Keep bacteria at bay and wash it away

Running all of your taps and your shower for a few minutes each day will cut the risk of legionella bacteria lurking in the system. The bacteria can cause Legionnaires' Disease which can make you very ill.

### Symptoms include:

- having a flu-like illness with aching muscles
- tiredness
- headaches
- a dry cough
- a fever

Diarrhoea, confusion, a bad chest and breathing problems may also be symptoms.

If you are experiencing any of these, please call **NHS 111**, visit the **nhs.uk** website or contact your GP for advice.



# GET INVOLVED



We're excited to announce we have recently launched new ways for you to get involved in the housing service. You may have already seen information in previous newsletters and consultations. Thank you to the 178 of you who have already expressed interest in getting involved!

The Resident Engagement Panel has had their first meeting which was very successful. Our Armchair Advisors have also started to make a difference by filling in surveys, questionnaires and providing input on tenant communications.

## Ways to be involved in your housing service

### Resident Engagement Panel

This group looks at the performance of the housing service, suggests improvements and carries out service reviews on specific parts of the service. The group meets every three months for two hours, work may also be required between meetings.

### Independent Living Forum

The forum meets every three months within one of our Independent Living schemes. Each scheme can send up to two residents to attend the forum on its behalf to promote the best interest of those living within the scheme.

### Leaseholder Forum

This forum will meet once a year to go through feedback on the leaseholder service. There will also be an opportunity to raise issues throughout the year through the resident engagement team or homeownership team.

### Armchair Advisors

All you need to do is give us your email address, we will then send you surveys, questionnaires, tenant communications content for comments and more! You don't need to commit much time at all and only be involved when it suits you.

### Community Champions

We hope to launch Community Champions within the next few months. You will play a key role in informing the council of the issues within your neighbourhood. This includes going on estate visits with other like-minded tenants, council officers, contractors and councillors.

You will also host and take part in local conversations including neighbourhood days.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact the resident engagement team on **getinvolved@canterbury.gov.uk** or call **07597 528 428**

## Contacting us

**Online:** You can get in touch with us 24 hours a day, seven days a week at **canterbury.gov.uk/contact**. Complete the online form and one of the team will get back to you as soon as possible within normal office hours.

**By telephone:** Call us on **01227 862 142**. Lines are open 8.45am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays).

### By appointment:

The council offices are open for booked appointments only. Please do not go to the office without an appointment as the vast majority of our staff are working from home and we will not be able to see you if you have not booked. If you need to see a member of staff in person, you can book an appointment by calling **01227 862 142**. Appointments are only for things that can't be sorted out online or over the phone.