

January 2024

TENANT NEWS

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Happy New Year to you all.

I would like to start by thanking everyone who participated in our Tenant Satisfaction Survey, I am pleased to report that overall tenant satisfaction has increased, we have collected the results and shared them on pages 4&5 for you to view.

It's important to us that we listen to you and make the changes you feel are needed to improve the service. Following the survey results we will be creating an action plan based on your feedback that we will share in the Spring Bulletin.

We know that this time of year can bring difficulties and challenges. If you are struggling with your rent or energy bills, then please contact our team as soon as possible. Head to page 9 to find out more about the help and support available.

I also wanted to draw your attention to the tenant handbook available to view on our website. We've broken the guide down into sections to make sure that it's quick and easy to find what you need, when you need it. You can find it by visiting [/folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-handbooks](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-handbooks)

I was invited to attend the official re-opening of Ross House in the Summer and would like to thank the tenants who kindly opened up their homes to us so we could see the improvements that had been made. The new and improved block is a fantastic example of



how we have been able to utilise the funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund alongside the council's match funding to make tenants homes more comfortable for them. You can read about the event and future of the project on page 8.

Tenants are at the heart of what we do so I look forward to meeting more of you and working with you to ensure that we continue to provide a high quality service.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Tenant News.

Councillor Rebecca Shoob

Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

👉 What do you think of Tenant News?

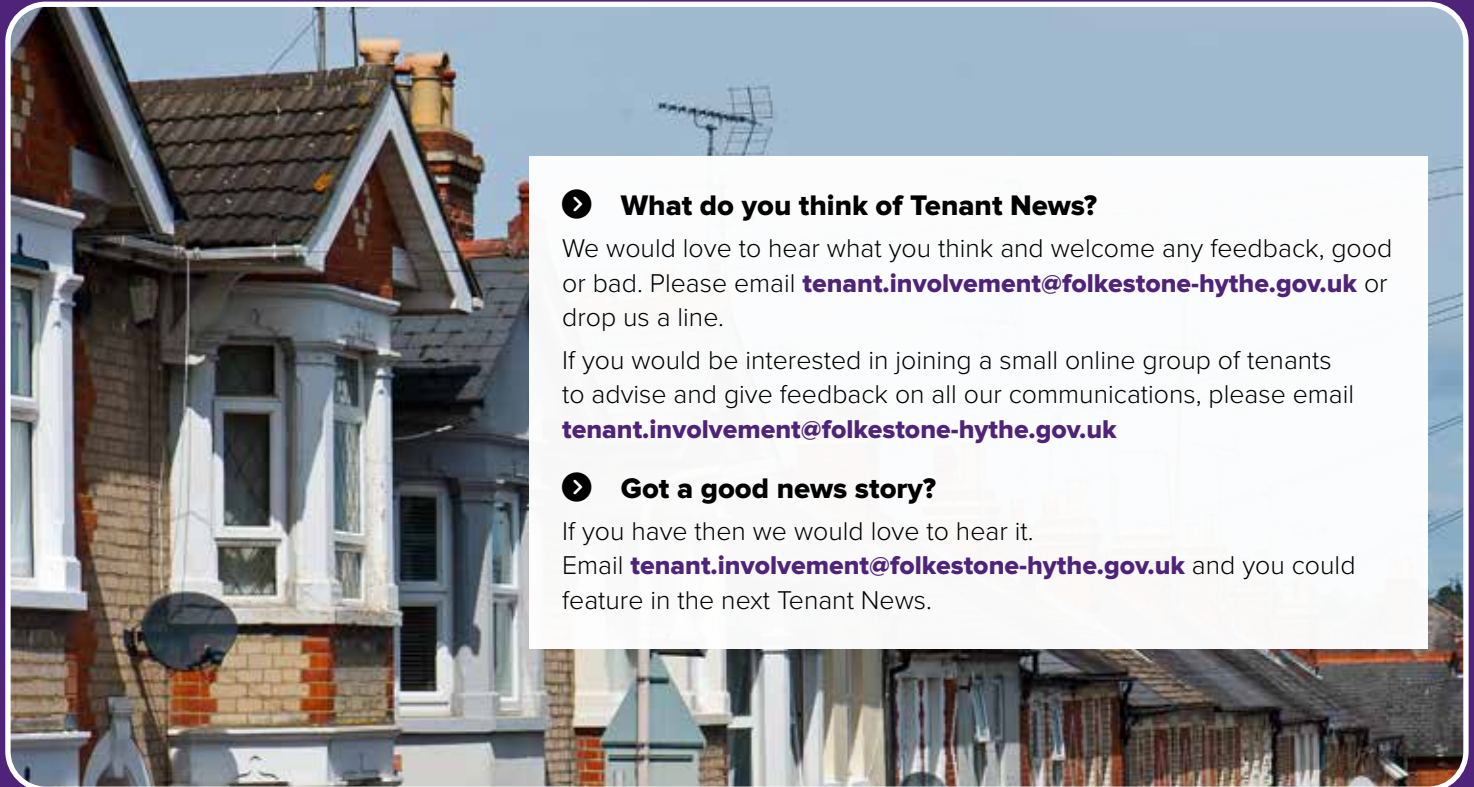
We would love to hear what you think and welcome any feedback, good or bad. Please email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or drop us a line.

If you would be interested in joining a small online group of tenants to advise and give feedback on all our communications, please email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

👉 Got a good news story?

If you have then we would love to hear it.

Email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk and you could feature in the next Tenant News.



Better Housing Better Health

This free service is run by the National Energy Foundation, a charity working to help residents access free advice and support if they are in or at risk of fuel poverty.

Better Housing Better Health can give advice on how to stay warm at home, provide free home energy visits and sign up those in need of additional support to the Priority Services Register if they are eligible.

If you would find any of this helpful, you can contact Better Housing Better Health on freephone **0800 107 0044** or visit their website at **bhbh.org.uk** to find out more.



Contents insurance

Did you know it's your responsibility to arrange home contents insurance?

The council is responsible for building insurance and the cost of this is included in your rent, but we don't insure your furniture or belongings.

It might sound dramatic, but if there was a fire or flood in your home, could you afford to replace or repair your possessions?

We offer a contents insurance scheme for our tenants. You can choose the level of cover, but it starts from as little as 78p a week and the payments will be collected as part of your rent.

To apply for the scheme or to find out more, visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenancy/tenant-insurance, email housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or call **01303 853300**.



Fire safety

Making sure your home is safe is important for everyone.

You can complete a free online home fire safety check at safelincs.co.uk/hfsc. It will take around 15 minutes to do and it will take you through your home, one room at a time, with simple questions to help you spot fire risks, and offer advice on what you can do to reduce those risks.

You will then get a personalised fire safety action plan to help keep you and your household safe from fire.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service also offers free home fire safety visits to anyone who:

- ▶ Is aged 70 or over
- ▶ Is living with dementia
- ▶ Has a long term health condition
- ▶ Has young children or is pregnant
- ▶ Is a smoker

If you'd like to request a home fire safety visit, you can submit a referral form at kent.fire-uk.org/hfsv or call 0800 923 7000.



Kent Fire & Rescue Service

⚠ Scam alert

Fraudsters and rogue traders take every opportunity they can to try and get hold of your money, so you need to be alert to possible scams.

All our staff and contractors wear ID when they visit residents. If you receive a letter or a phone call from someone claiming to work for the council and you are in any doubt as to whether it is genuine, call us on 01303 853300 to check.

If you have fallen victim to a scam, please contact the police straight away and report it to Action Fraud at actionfraud.police.uk or on 0330 123 2040.

Loft spaces

If you have a loft, please do not access or store items in there, or try to convert the loft space or use it as an extra bedroom. Doing this can pose a risk to your health and safety and could cause damage to the property.

The tenant satisfaction survey results are in!

More than 680 of you took the time to respond to our tenant satisfaction survey last summer and told us what you think about the housing service.

Congratulations to the three winners of our prize draw, one tenant from Cheriton, one from Folkestone and one from New Romney, who have each received a £50 Love2Shop voucher!

We are required to report tenant satisfaction data to the Regulator of Social Housing, which also enables us to see how we compare to other social landlords across the country.

We very much value your feedback and we will be working with the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) to complete an action plan based on the findings from the survey. We will tell you about the survey action plan in our next tenant bulletin, and you can read more about the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel on page 10 of this newsletter.

This is what you told us:



Overall satisfaction with the housing service

71% **+3%**
from 2022



Satisfaction with repairs

72% **+4%**
from 2022



Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair

66% **+5%**
from 2022



Satisfaction that your home is well maintained

70% **+5%**
from 2022



Satisfaction that your home is safe

78% **+13%**
from 2022



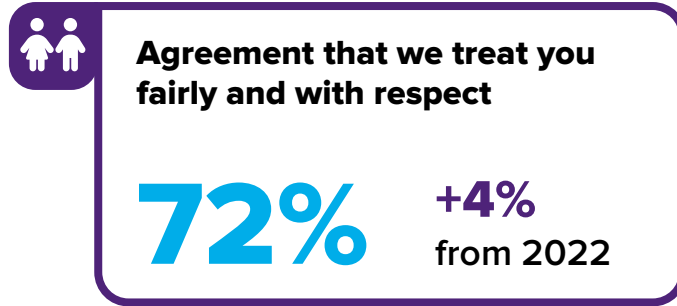
Satisfaction that we listen to and act on your views

55% **+6%**
from 2022

Listening to your comments

We highly value tenant engagement. It's important to us that our tenants have a say in how we do things. Through engagement we aim to foster a culture of mutual trust and respect.

Visit the council's 'Get Involved' web page [/folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/ways-to-get-involved](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/ways-to-get-involved) to see the variety of ways you can have your say and get involved in service delivery, together we can co-create a great housing service.



Your Tenant Handbook

The tenant handbook contains lots of useful information about living in your home and community.

You'll get a better idea of how and who to contact when you read the handbook. It will also provide examples of when you should contact us and when we, as your landlord, will contact you.

Your tenancy agreement is the contract between us and you. The handbook does not replace your tenancy agreement. However, it will help you understand what to expect from us as your landlord and what we expect of you as a tenant.

The handbook has been broken down into shorter sections so you can find what you need quickly and easily. The sections are as follows:

- Introduction
- Moving Home
- Your tenancy
- Have your say
- Keeping in touch
- Paying your rent
- Health safety & security
- Living in your community
- Keeping your home in good condition
- How to report a problem with your home

You can find the handbook on our website [/folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-handbooks](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-handbooks). Hard copies are also available upon request for those who are unable to access our website.



2023 neighbourhood inspection results

Our neighbourhood inspections take place during spring and summer and they are an opportunity for tenants to meet with staff and contractor representatives to share any concerns and help us identify problems in their area.

The issues identified are separated into two categories by the neighbourhood officers:

- **Immediate:** minor or day to day repairs or other issues that can be solved quickly.
- **Long term:** landscaping issues, planned repairs, external decoration, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour, quality of cleaning or other services.

Here are just a few examples of the issues raised this year and how they were actioned/referred:



5 abandoned vehicles

Notices issued.



Litter

Collected on the spot during the inspection.



Weeds along footpaths

To be cleared by caretaking team.



Fly-tipping

Clearance of rubbish ordered.



Vegetation above sheds to be removed

Request to cut back sent to grounds maintenance and caretakers.



Trees to be cut back

Requests to cut the trees back sent to grounds maintenance.



Garden note drops took place

Neighbourhood Officers to follow up if the situations do not improve.



Blocked gullies

Gullies to be cleared by Mears.



A larger scale litter pick needed

Caretakers to arrange litter pick.



Loose kerb and hole outside homes

Passed to Kent Highways to action.



Broken air vents.

Mears to attend and carry out work.



Roof tile replacement and work

Mears to attend and carry out work.



Bin store doors damaged

Noted as an action point by Assets and Development team.



Aerials

To be removed from external walls of the building as they are no longer in use.

In total 137 of the 140 issues raised have been actioned or referred.



You can visit [/folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/neighbourhood-inspections](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/neighbourhood-inspections) for a full breakdown of the number of issues raised in each location and how many have since been actioned or referred.

If you are interested in taking part in this year's inspections or would like further information about how you can get involved and share your views please email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Save time with housing online

Housing online is the new tenant sign-in portal that can be accessed via the council website. Not only is our new service designed to save you time but if you sign up before 16 February 2024 you could be in with a chance of winning a £100 voucher for decorating materials.

The new service allows tenants to:

- View and update contact and personal details
- View rent balances and statements
- Make online payments
- Set up a Direct Debit
- Request a repair
- Chase the progress of a repair
- View repair history
- Respond to surveys
- Upload documents
- Make payments



To create a Housing Online account, visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo

Please note that to create an account you will need to enter an email address, a password, your date of birth and your rent reference number. You will then receive a verification link in your emails.

This will only need to be inputted once, from then on just a username and password will be required.

Tackling tenancy fraud

With social housing in short supply, it is important that our homes are only lived in by the people they are intended for. Sadly, this is not always the case.

Fraud is when someone lies or hides the truth to get a home that they have no right to live in. Tenancy fraud is illegal and it prevents those with genuine housing needs from gaining access to social housing.

Tenancy fraud can either be in the form of:

- **Subletting** — where a tenant lets out their home to someone else without the council's knowledge or permission
- **Non-occupation** — where the tenant does not use the property as their main home
- **Key selling** — where a tenant passes their keys on to someone else who takes over their tenancy illegally
- **Deception** — where someone gives false information on a housing application in order to get a tenancy

Our Neighbourhood and Independent Living teams are trained to look out for and investigate suspected tenancy fraud, and we carry out regular checks to make sure the right people are living in our properties. We work with other fraud teams within the council, and with the police, to investigate and identify whether fraud is being committed.

We also respond to reports of suspected fraud from other tenants, members of the public or other organisations.

If you think a neighbour might be committing tenancy fraud, please report this to us, either online at

folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tackling-tenancy-fraud or by calling

01303 853300. You will remain anonymous and we will never share your details with the person you have reported.

Home improvements receive warm welcome



“I couldn’t wait to move back to Ross House as it is my home and I missed it terribly. Anyone who had not seen it would think it was a new build – and those who had would think it was a different building.”

These are the words of Charlene Knight-Whitmore, one of our tenants who has benefitted from retrofit work undertaken as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) project.

Charlene moved back into the revamped Ross House, Folkestone in the summer and is delighted to be back in our first ‘net zero’ enabled residential block.

Elaine Cox, the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel chair, officially reopened Ross House in July at an event attended by tenants, councillors, staff and tenant representatives.

Attendees were able to view the extensive retrofit work which included externally insulating and rendering

the building, insulating the loft and under floor voids, installing photovoltaic panels on the roof and adding more energy efficient air source heat pumps.

The work was completed using funding from the first wave of the SHDF, alongside match funding from Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Over 120 homes have benefitted from energy efficiency improvements so far. With more homes set to benefit in 2024 following our successful bid for Wave 2 of SHDF funding.

The funding will be matched by the council bringing the total spend on improving the homes and wellbeing of tenants to £5.2 million.

The new grant will continue the work begun last year and will enable us to improve the energy efficiency of a further 300 homes over the next two years.

Thinking of buying your council home?

Buying your home can be a complicated and sometimes confusing process. It is one of the biggest decisions that you will make and will affect everyone who lives in the property with you.

Owning a property brings with it many different responsibilities and financial commitments. These can include:

- Repairs to the property
- Mortgage payments
- Service charges for the upkeep of the property and estate
- There will also be other costs to consider, like buildings insurance

Over the past 12 months there’s been a steady increase in the Bank of England’s interest rates. This has in turn made mortgages more expensive. There’s also been a reduction in the range of Right to Buy mortgage products available. Therefore, apart from the usual documents needed to make an application to buy your home, we ask that you take time to consider whether buying the property is achievable and affordable to you.

More information on the Right to Buy, including details of what’s required to make an application can be found on our website at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/right-to-buy](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/right-to-buy). Please read through all the documents carefully before making an application.

If you have any queries about the Right to Buy, please contact leasehold.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk.

We're here to help

We know that these are challenging times for many tenants, which is why we are urging you to contact us if you are worried about debt or experiencing financial difficulties.

We have a committed welfare team to help with rent arrears, claiming benefits and budgeting advice.

If you are worried about debt or experiencing financial difficulties, contact the council to discuss finding the best solution for you. Our welfare team can help with rent arrears, claiming benefits and budgeting advice.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit you may be able to apply for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) if you are in need of financial support to help with your rent or housing cost.

If you receive Council Tax Reduction and are facing exceptional hardship, you may be able to get Financial Support Payments (FSP). To apply for DHP or FSP please visit our website and complete the online application form.

To discuss any of the above in more detail, email housing.income@folkestone-hythe.org.uk or call **01303 853300**.

Benefit and budget calculator



If you're not sure whether you are entitled to any additional benefit payments, you can use our online benefit and budget calculator to see if you might be able to get some (or more) benefits.

Access the calculator by:

- visiting folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/benefits-support
- clicking "Calculate your entitlement".

Mobile food service

A mobile foodbank and pantry service now operates in several locations across the district giving easier access for people struggling to meet the increased cost of food.

The van is the mobile arm of the existing Shepway Foodbank, operated by Folkestone's Rainbow Centre and it will provide support to residents who have been referred by agencies to the foodbank.

The van will also deliver a mobile version of the Hythe Pantry service which has been supporting its members by offering a weekly food shop for just £5 per week.

A money advice service and other cost-of-living support will be available at the locations visited by the mobile van. Information will also be available about schemes for financial and general support through the council's Household Support Fund and Home Essentials Fund.

The locations of the van will be as follows and the mobile service will be at the location at the same time on the same day of the week.

➤ **Hawkinge Community Centre:** Heron Forstal Avenue, Hawkinge, CT18 7FP on Wednesdays – 10am to midday

➤ **Harbour Church Folkestone:** Canterbury Road, Folkestone, CT19 5NR on Thursdays – 10am to midday

➤ **Folkestone Academy:** Academy Lane, Folkestone, CT19 5FP on Fridays – 2.50pm to 4pm

➤ **Hardy Hall:** Skinner Lane, Lydd, TN29 9HN on Mondays – 10am to 11am



Rainbow Centre Food Services
Manager Wendy Lehnert

Community hubs that provide support, including food and warm spaces:

➤ **Folkestone Community Hub:** Operates from Age UK Folkestone, 65 Shaftesbury Road, Folkestone, CT19 4NS. Open 9am-4pm weekdays.

☎ 01303 316186

✉ communitysupport@ageukskc.org.uk

➤ **Hythe Community Hub:** Operates from Age UK Hythe & Lyminge, Sanford House, Stade Street, Hythe, CT21 6BD.

Open 9am-3.45pm weekdays, 10am-2pm weekends (phone line only)

☎ 01303 269602

✉ sm@ageukhl.org.uk

➤ **Romney Marsh Community Hub:** Operates from Rolfe Lane, New Romney, TN28 8JR. Open 9am-4pm weekdays.

☎ 01797 363888

✉ hello@rmch.org.uk

Visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living for more information about the help and support available.

Visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living to find out what further help and support is available.

A successful second year

The Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) celebrated its second birthday in October.

The panel has gone from strength to strength following its creation and has shared member feedback on a wide range of strategic issues relating to the wider housing service. Even more impressively they do this on a voluntary basis.

Their second year has seen panel members grow and develop even further and the panel and its members have been nominated for several awards.

Here are just some of the things STAP has influenced, given feedback on and made additions to:

Policies & Procedures	Projects		Strategies	Contracts & Procurement
Rechargeable Repairs	Decarbonisation Project	Capital Works Programme	Housing Asset Management Strategy	Reactive Repairs
Allocations Policy	Regulator for Social Housing – Pilot Inspection Framework	Repairs / Planned Works	Tenant Engagement Strategy & Action Plan	Communal Cleaning
Repairs & Maintenance	Ross House	Housing Online	Performance overall	External works
Ending of Fixed Term Tenancies	Independent Living Review	Housing communications overall	Tenant Satisfaction Measures	Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Based on the tenant satisfaction measures
Disabled Adaptations	Under occupancy	Tenant Handbook & Tenant Charter	Operations and Assets and Development	Telecare (Lifeline) replacement



Panel members were also responsible for the successful tenant garden competition which they arranged, ran and judged. The competition will be taking place again this year, you can find out more details by visiting [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tenant-garden-competition](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tenant-garden-competition).



Winter wellbeing

Your thermostat

Understanding how your boiler works and how to set it correctly could help you to reduce your heating bill

The thermostat should be set to the lowest comfortable temperature, typically between 18°C and 21°C. Turning up your room thermostat won't make your home heat any faster. Room thermostats need a free flow of air to sense the temperature, so make sure they're not blocked by curtains or furniture, and keep them away from heat sources.



Draught proof your home

There are four main areas to consider for draught proofing – keyholes, letterboxes and gaps around the edges and bottom of doors and windows. Use keyhole and letterbox covers and draught excluders to block out draughts.

Visit energysavingtrust.org.uk/take-control-your-heating-home for more tips.



Reducing condensation

Keeping condensation at bay can be difficult, especially during the winter months. Here are some small changes that can make a big difference to the levels of condensation in your home.

- Keep lids on pots when cooking, open a window and make sure your extractor fan is running.
- Ventilate tumble driers externally unless you have a self-condensing model.
- Keep bathroom doors closed during and after bathing and showering. Open the window and make sure your extractor fan is running.
- Do not dry clothes on radiators.
- Ventilate your home. The most effective way to ventilate is to open several windows to allow a through draft. Opening windows for five to ten minutes a couple of times a day will remove moist air. Open trickle vents on your windows if you have them.
- Keep furniture away from walls, leave a gap of a couple of inches to allow for air flow.
- Do not fill cupboards to bursting point – allow the air to flow.
- Ensure you clean down any areas affected by mould as soon as it appears. Use a mould and mildew cleaner or diluted white vinegar to treat the areas. This may need to be done on a regular basis during the colder months.

If the problem continues, please contact us and we will carry out an inspection of your home to see if there could be any other contributing factors.

Please report any repair issues that could be causing damp in your home, such as leaking gutters, pipes or anything else that you feel may be a factor.



Contact your housing team

Online:

You can get in touch with us 24 hours a day, seven days a week by visiting [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)

In addition to calling and emailing the council you can use our LiveChat service via our website. LiveChat currently offers assistance on the following council services:

Council tax & council tax reduction

Housing benefit

Planning

Parking

Recycling, waste


and environmental services

You can also access a Contact Form on our website [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/contact-us](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/contact-us)

MyAccount is a new easier and quicker way to access your council services. You can register on the website and then find all the information relevant to you in one place.

You can also access our new service Housing Online via MyAccount (see page 7 for more details).

For suggestions, compliments or complaints about the Housing Management Service

 [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback)

By telephone:

Call us on **01303 853300**. Lines are open Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm.

By post:

If you would prefer to write to us, please use the address below:

Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2QY.

Or you can email us housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Report tenancy fraud

If you think a neighbour might be committing tenancy fraud, please report this to us anonymously, either online at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tackling-tenancy-fraud](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tackling-tenancy-fraud) or by calling **01303 853300**.

Need to report a repair

For day-to-day repairs call Mears on **0800 313 4740**.

For gas, hot water and central heating repairs call Swale heating on **0800 987 4034**.

Email housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk to book an inspection with your neighbourhood surveyor.

