

January 2023

TENANT NEWS

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**Folkestone
& Hythe**
District Council

I would like to start my column by wishing you all a Happy New Year.

In 2023 we will be working hard as your landlord to implement our action plan following your Tenant Satisfaction Survey responses.

Our tenants are at the heart of everything we do and it's important to us that we listen to you and make the changes you feel are needed to improve the service. You can find out more about some of the things we're doing in response to the feedback we've received on page four.

Our Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) and Independent Living Forum (ILF) have been instrumental in shaping the housing management service thus far. I have found attending their meetings incredibly useful and both groups were extremely productive in 2022.

I am also pleased STAP chair Elaine Bostock and vice chair Carl Shorter have both contributed to this edition and written about their experience as panel members, you can read all about this on page 11.

If you've made a pledge this year to be kinder to the planet then check out page seven where we've got some tips to help reduce your carbon footprint and also help you save money too.

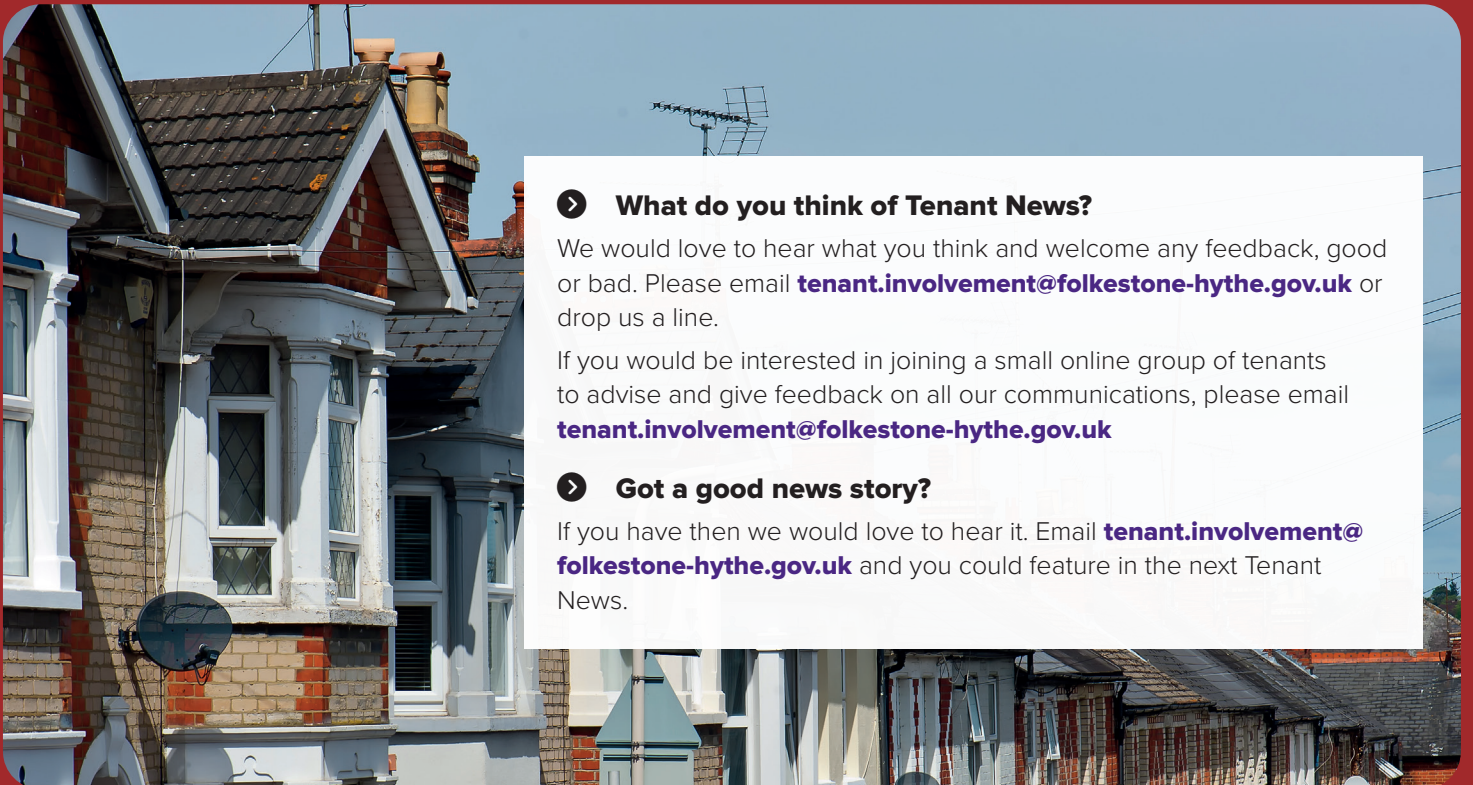
If you are struggling with your rent or energy bills, then don't forget it's important that you contact our



team as soon as possible. We want to make sure you're getting the help you need, when you need it. Head to page six to find out more.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Tenant News.

Councillor David Godfrey
Cabinet Member for Housing
and Special Projects



➤ 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.

New social housing built on disused site in Folkestone

The site of a derelict building in Cheriton has been transformed into 27 new homes for local people. The mix of three and four-bedroomed houses and 18 two-bedroomed apartments have been built at the former Brockman Centre in Cheriton High Street.

The properties will be offered at social rent and managed by housing association, Moat Homes. The development was officially handed over by Leath Park Developments and main contractor Jenner Group in November

F&HDC Cabinet member for Housing and Special Projects, Cllr David Godfrey, cut a ribbon to officially open the scheme.

He said: "Partnership working has allowed us to ensure that this development delivers much-needed, high quality, housing at social rent for our residents.

"It is incredibly important to the council and our housing association partners that tenants feel safe, happy and secure in their homes. The 27 properties have been advertised and let to households registered on the council's housing list."



Energy efficiency project steams ahead

Work has begun utilising the £2 million government grant from The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, as well as the £800,000 put forward from the housing revenue account, to create more energy efficient homes for our tenants.

Tenants have worked with members of the housing team and a qualified independent energy assessor, to carry out detailed assessments of their homes.

Following the assessments, bespoke plans for each home are in the process of being created. These unique plans are tailored to each home specifically to meet their individual needs.

In practice this is likely to mean multiple measures are delivered in each property, this could be anything from improving the insulation of the walls and roof or upgrading windows and doors. At the same time any damp or mould issues found will be identified and addressed.

All these energy efficiency measures will be installed at no cost to tenants and support will be offered throughout the process by both our contractors and the housing team.

Staying safe and secure

We want all of our tenants to feel safe and secure within their homes.

To ensure this is the case we have created the option for tenants who wish to have a password protocol put into place.

The protocol will give you a unique password that will be kept on file for contractors to quote when attending appointments at your property so you can be confident and

comfortable allowing them into your home.

Please know that this is an *additional* security measure and does not replace the requirement for all staff to carry with them their ID cards and wear branded uniform.

To set up a password/code, please email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or call **01303 853723**.

A warm welcome to our new contactor



Aaron Services is now F&HDC's selected contractor to undertake electrical safety checks and any resulting remedial works in our domestic properties. Legally these checks must be carried out at least once every five years.

Your voice, our action

More than 500 tenants gave us very insightful feedback about key areas of our service – including repairs, neighbourhood, staff contact, priorities for improvement and communications in the last tenant satisfaction survey.

Working with the STAP, we've put together an action plan and want to let you know about some of the things we are doing off the back of your comments.

At Phoenix Court in Folkestone a lot of residents told us that the refuse arrangements were not working.

There were not enough bins and non-residents were using these too.

This meant that the bins would get full, and residents would leave refuse sacks on the ground and they would then get torn open by seagulls.

In response to what the residents were telling us we

- Increased the number of bins at the block
- Built a cage enclosure, so even if waste is left outside the bins, the seagulls cannot get to it.

Residents have let us know that this situation has now improved as a result.

Deciding to downsize

Feedback from the STAP is that tenants want more information about the options and incentives of downsizing their homes. Moving into sheltered, 1-bedroomed or studio accommodation, may mean you are eligible for one of the following incentives:

£2,000 if you move from three-bedroomed or larger property with a garden

£1,500 if you move from two-bedroomed property with a garden;

£500 for each bedroom if you move from a property without a garden (up to £1,000), or

£300 for each bedroom if you move from a property releasing bedrooms with a garden to a property with fewer bedrooms and a garden.

We can also help you to move from a home that has been specially adapted for someone with a disability and you no longer need the adaptations.

You could be eligible for £1,000 if your home has an adaptation for a person with disabilities. This amount is payable in addition to any of the other amounts stated for which you may qualify.

We will also pay for your removal expenses if you move to a smaller property.

Get ready for our 2023 garden competition!

Keen gardeners will know winter is the time to start planning what to do with your garden.

Following feedback from the tenant survey we know how important it is to you that we make positive contributions to our neighbourhoods.

This is why we'll be running our garden competition again and we will be encouraging

all of our tenants to put on their gardening gloves no matter how big or small their space is.

We'll be sharing tips throughout the year to help you along, so whether it's your first time picking up a plant or if you're a dab hand with the shears make sure you get involved.

The categories are:

- Best front garden
- Best back garden
- Best containers, pots and baskets
- Best community or communal garden
- Best vegetable patch
- Best junior gardener
- Best new garden
- Cllr Keren Belcourt Rose
- Sue Willsher Cup



Tackling tenancy fraud

What is tenancy fraud?

Tenancy fraud is when someone lies or hides the truth to get a home that they have no right to live in. It is a big problem as it prevents those with genuine housing needs from accessing social housing.

The three types of tenancy fraud

1

Subletting — This is the most common type of fraud we see. Tenants will let out their property without our knowledge or permission, often at high rents. Tenants often sublet to family or friends – **this is still tenancy fraud.**

2

Key selling — This is when a tenant passes on their keys to someone who takes over their tenancy illegally, usually in return for a one-off payment.

3

Deception — This is when a person gets a property by giving false information in their application. For example, they might claim to have more people living with them or they may not reveal that they are letting out a property they own.

What are we doing to tackle tenancy fraud?

Our Neighbourhoods team is trained to look out for and to investigate suspected tenancy fraud.

We carry out regular tenancy checks to make sure that the right people are living in our properties – and respond to reports from other tenants, members of the public and other organisations.

The vast majority of our tenancies are fine and above board. But where we suspect tenancy fraud, we will work with other fraud teams within the council, the police and any other partners to determine whether fraud is being committed.

What to do if you think a neighbour is committing fraud

Fraud is damaging. It can lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour, cause financial loss and prevent someone who really needs a home from getting one.

Please contact us if you think that a neighbour living in one of our homes may be committing tenancy fraud. If you are not sure but have a suspicion, you should still report it to us. Please give as much information as possible so we can investigate thoroughly.

We always take reports of fraud seriously and you will remain anonymous – we will never share your details with the person you have reported.

You can email us on housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or call on **01303 853300**.

Housing Online



Housing Online is a new service, due to be launched in January, which will provide council tenants with 24/7 access to their own information via tablet, PC or smartphone.

Housing online will enable tenants to view and update information digitally at their convenience via the council website.

After logging in access will include:

- Viewing and updating contact and personal details
- Viewing rent balances and statements
- Making online payments
- Setting up a Direct Debit
- Requesting a repair
- Chasing the progress of a repair
- Viewing repair history

We're here to help you

We know that these are challenging times for many tenants. Making sure you pay your rent is very important. Please don't wait – contact us if you are worried about debt or are experiencing financial difficulties. We have a committed welfare team to help with rent arrears, claiming benefits and budgeting advice.

If you have other debts and are struggling to pay your bills, we can help you get in touch with:



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.gov.uk or call **01303 853300**.

Community support

The three community hubs in Folkestone & Hythe provide a wide range of support including helping with food if needed:


Folkestone Community Hub

-  Operates from Age UK Folkestone, 65 Shaftesbury Avenue, 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, and 10am–2pm (phone only) at weekends.
-  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

Warm spaces are free, warm and welcoming places that are open for the public to use. You can find the nearest warm space to you at www.warmwelcome.uk

Wellbeing and emotional support

South Kent Mind | South Kent Mind makes sure anyone with a mental health problem in Folkestone, Hythe or Romney Marsh has somewhere to turn for advice and support. To speak to one of the team call **01303 250090** between 9.30am and 3pm Monday to Friday.

 southkentmind.org.uk

Live Well Kent | Live Well Kent and Medway provides free mental health support for people aged 17+.

 livewellkent.org.uk

Release the Pressure | Life can get tough sometimes but talking can help. Release the Pressure has a highly-trained and experienced team available 24/7 to provide expert support no matter what you are going through. Don't suffer in silence: text the word Kent to **85258** or call **08001 070160**.

 kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/release-the-pressure

KOOTH | A digital mental health and wellbeing company working to provide a welcoming space for digital mental health care, available to all.

 kooth.com

Moodspark | A site created by young people in Kent, for young people in Kent. Here they can access top tips, videos, articles and more about a variety of wellbeing topics

 moodspark.org.uk

Energy saving tips

We know that energy prices have been increasing and that some people are struggling to keep their home warm and comfortable, so here are some tips to help you save energy and keep your heating on during the winter months.

Turning down the thermostat by 1°C



Turning appliances off rather than leaving them on standby



Ensuring lights are switched off when leaving the room



Not overfilling the kettle when boiling water



Adjust radiator controls so you don't overheat underused rooms



Remember to turn off appliances at the plug when not in use



Use your washing machine on a 30-degree cycle instead of higher temperatures



Keeping your shower time to just four minutes could save a typical household £95 a year on their energy bills

Making your food last longer



- Did you know that by adjusting your fridge temperature so that it's between 0-5°C can keep your food fresher for longer?
- As cold air sinks, you will find that the coldest spot in your fridge is at the bottom. If you have foods with a short expiry date, you should try to put them in this part of your fridge since it's the area with a stable temperature. Just by safely storing your dairy items in the cooler parts of your fridge you can help them last longer.
- Use a cool bag to keep chilled food cool on the way home from the shops. This will help to keep your food fresher for longer and regulate your fridge temperature.
- Cool cooked food at room temperature and place in the fridge within one to two hours. Not only will this help to prevent your fridge heating up, but it will also stop the growth of bacteria on your food.




For more help and support visit [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-and-support-with-your-finances](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-and-support-with-your-finances)

Your responsive repairs service

Timely repairs are important to make sure our tenants feel safe and secure in well-maintained homes. Working with our contractors, we aim to attend an emergency repair within four hours, even if this is only to make safe; we aim to respond to an urgent repair within three working days and a standard repair within 16 working days. Should it not be possible to respond to an urgent or standard repair within these contracted timescales, we will keep in touch with you.

Contracted repair times are:

	4 HOURS for an emergency	3 WORKING DAYS for an urgent repair	16 WORKING DAYS for a standard repair
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From April to September Mears have attended the following:

	1046 EMERGENCY repairs	1088 URGENT repairs	2308 STANDARD repairs
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Help us, help you

Mears will send you a text message asking for feedback after work has been completed in your home. By responding to these messages, you can help us and Mears improve on all aspects of the service you receive.

Thursday, 21 July

Dear _____, In order for us to continuously improve our service to you, it is essential for us to get your regular feedback on your experience with Mears. Please could you take two minutes to complete a short survey. Please press the survey link here <http://eyeris.co/kSWb>. Kind regards, Mears. R

View all



13:48

Need to report a repair



Please contact the following to report any repairs:

Call **0800 313 4740** for Mears day-to-day repairs or email **housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk** to book an inspection with your neighbourhood surveyor.

Condensation conversation

Condensation can be a big problem in homes as it can lead to damp and mould. Condensation happens when warm moist air and steam comes into contact with a cold surface.

You can help tackle condensation in three main ways;



Reduce the amount of moisture in the air



Ventilate your home



Keep your home warm

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.
- ▶ If possible, ensure all rooms are adequately heated even if rarely used.
- ▶ Keep furniture away from walls, leave a gap of a couple of inches to allow for air flow.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Do not fill cupboards to bursting point, again, allow the air to flow.
- ▶ Ensure you clean down the areas affected by mould. 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.



We take reports of condensation, damp and mould very seriously. 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 to your home, leaking gutters, pipes or anything else that you feel may be a factor.

Celebrating STAP

Our Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) celebrated its first birthday in October.

Their roles as panel members often mean they offer support and assistance to other tenants, alongside sharing their views around strategic decisions with the wider housing service. Even more inspiringly they do all of this on a voluntary basis.

We thought we'd share what the STAP has achieved in their first year of working with us and we think you'll agree it's quite an impressive start.

They have looked at matters that cover every part of the housing service including:

 Rent and income	 Complaints	 Tenant engagement
 Assets management	 Housing operations	 Case management
 Repairs	 Major works	 Performance
 New Build	 Allocations	 Compliance

So far, STAP has been consulted on and influenced:

Policies & Procedures

- ▶ Rechargeable repairs
- ▶ Allocations
- ▶ Repairs and maintenance
- ▶ Ending of fixed term tenancies

Strategies

- ▶ Housing Asset Management Strategy
- ▶ Tenant Engagement Strategy and Action Plan
- ▶ Overall Performance

Currently or soon to be consulting on:

- ▶ The Housing Carbon Reduction plan
- ▶ Tenant Satisfaction Survey and Action Plan
- ▶ Independent Living Housing Review
- ▶ Repairs/planned works
- ▶ Housing Communications, overall Operations & Assets and Development
- ▶ Under occupancy
- ▶ Housing Online/ website content/ App roll out



We would like to say a big thank you to the STAP members for giving up their time and putting themselves forward as representatives for our tenants.

The work they do is incredibly valuable, and their input plays an important role in overseeing the work of the housing service at a strategic level and helping us to continuously improve.

In their own words

Elaine Bostock, Chair of STAP



“ I have been the chairperson for STAP from the beginning of 2021. Before that I was part of the Shepway Tenants & Leaseholders Board (STLB) for over 20 years and chair for 10. STAP is an advisory panel to the council and it is in their remit to include us in decision making or projects, after all we live in the properties, they are our homes.

I am passionate about speaking up for all tenants, communication is a key ingredient. By joining us in a way that you feel comfortable, you can make a big difference to us receiving a better quality of service from the council. ”

Carl Shorter, Vice chair of STAP



“ Being a member of STAP offers opportunities for tenants to get involved because we want to make sure that the services Folkestone & Hythe District Council offers are focused on the things that really matter to you, and that we are taking your views into account in the way that F&HDC look after your neighbourhood. By getting involved, we are helping to improve the quality of the services that F&HDC provide and to make your neighbourhood a better place for you and your neighbours to live. I am proud to be STAP's first vice chairman.

I was a Member and Secretary of the STLB and was a Member of East Kent Housing's Resident's Panel.

We are a panel made up of local F&HDC tenants, all with different avenues of expertise, a good mix, and it's working. We are a close knit group working to improve the service F&HDC provides...for YOU!

I am passionate about the area we live in and to help remove the social stigma of social housing. It will be a long process, change takes time, but we are determined to make our group a model for others to follow. All members of STAP are approachable and we encourage you to contact us, we are here representing you to the district council and we speak to those at the highest level. Use us, we are here for you, the tenant. ”

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

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

By telephone:

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

By post:

If you would prefer to write to us, please send your letters to:

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

 housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk





MyAccount - the easiest and quickest way to contact us:

Viewing the council information you need – when you need it – has been made even easier with the launch of MyAccount.

You can find out things relevant to you all in one place – including details about waste collections, council tax, benefits, and more – by using the quick and easy online system. For further details and to find out more about how to register, visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo

Social media:

To keep up to date with news from F&HDC you can follow us on social media:

-  [/FolkestoneandHytheDC](https://www.facebook.com/FolkestoneandHytheDC)
-  [@fstonehythedc](https://twitter.com/fstonehythedc)
-  [Folkestone and Hythe District Council](https://www.linkedin.com/company/folkestone-and-hythe-district-council)
-  [@folkestonehythedc](https://www.instagram.com/folkestonehythedc)

Or join the Facebook group for tenants and leaseholders:

-  [/groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders](https://www.facebook.com/groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders)

