

July 2023

# TENANT NEWS

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Folkestone  
& Hythe  
  
District Council



# Welcome to the July edition of Tenant News.

I am proud to be your new Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness – and look forward to working with tenants and the housing team to ensure the service you receive is of a high standard.

Our annual report (p6-8) shows the progress that has been made and the actions we need to take to further improve.

Involving tenants is incredibly important to me as you should always be at the heart of what we do.

I want to hear what you think about the housing management service, ensure your voices are heard and that suggestions are seriously considered. There are lots of different ways to share points of view (p9).

Thank you to all those who responded to our recent tenant satisfaction survey. If you haven't yet completed survey, there's still time, you can call 01303 853270 to complete the survey over the phone.

Our updated Tenant Charter (p4-5) outlines the commitments you make to us as a tenant and, more importantly, the guarantees we give you as landlord. Working together is a strength and will help us deliver the best service we can.



I'm very pleased to say we've been successful in securing money from the second round of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (p3).

It will help even more tenants in the district benefit from new energy efficient measures, following the successful work carried out recently in the first wave.

I hope you enjoy this edition and the summer months ahead.

## **Councillor Rebecca Shoob**

Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

### ➤ **What do you think of Tenant News?**

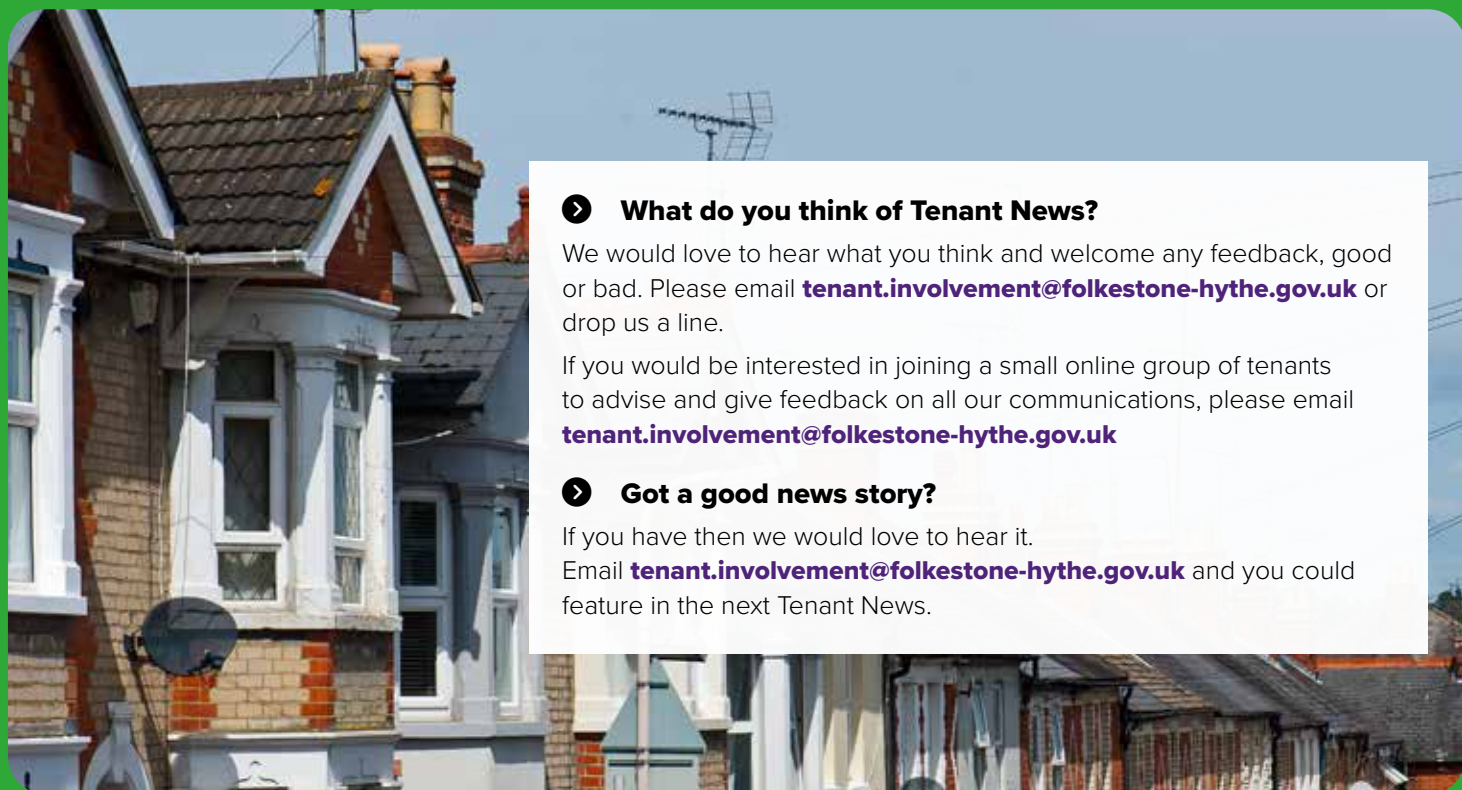
We would love to hear what you think and welcome any feedback, good or bad. Please email [tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or drop us a line.

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](mailto: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](mailto:tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) and you could feature in the next Tenant News.



## Further investment to decarbonise and improve more homes across the district

The council has been awarded £2.6m to further improve the energy efficiency of council-managed homes.

The funding from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero 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 under Wave1 of The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). This is seeing tenants in more than 100 homes benefitting from improvements such as new cavity wall insulation, double-glazed windows, new external doors and solar panel installation.

With an aim to create green job opportunities in the district, the council has used qualified local contractors for some of the insulation work and will continue this local approach with Wave 2.

Tenants will be individually contacted and a time arranged for the work to be carried out over the next 24 months, with the funding being used for homes with the most urgent need.



Image by Vectorjuice on Freepik

## Crown can back scheme

Crown Paints has launched a new sustainability programme that recycles their empty paint cans into new tins, flowerpots and benches.

The company provides our new tenants with decorating packs when they move into their new home. The used cans can be collected whilst Crown are delivering the new orders across the district.

### Our new cleaning contractor

Following a detailed tender process, BlueFrog Cleaning Services will be our new partner for cleaning the inside of our blocks of flats from October onwards. The new contract has been updated following consultation with tenants in 2022. Tenants were also involved in the tender evaluation process.

As part of the new contract, we will be introducing new systems for monitoring the quality of the cleaning service, and making it easier for you to give us feedback or report any concerns.

Mike Ellis, Founder and Operations Director of BlueFrog, says: "We are looking forward to working in partnership with the Housing team, to provide a great cleaning service to council tenants and leaseholders. We look forward to meeting lots of residents as we go about our work, and we are always open to feedback and suggestions about service improvements."



### Swale Heating customer portal

Did you know you can now book your heating and hot water repairs online? Visit [customerportal.swaleheating.com](http://customerportal.swaleheating.com) to register. Once you're set up, you'll also be able to track the time your engineer will arrive on the day of the appointment.



# Our Tenant Charter

## As your landlord, we will:

### **Provide you with a safe and secure home.**

We will aim to respond to all reasonable repair requests in an appropriate time frame and we will treat health and safety issues as a priority.



### **Deal promptly and fairly with any complaints you make.**

If we can't resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, we will tell you how you can access the Housing Ombudsman Service.



### **Provide you with a good quality home and keep it in a good state of repair.**

We will also look to invest in and improve our neighbourhoods through environmental improvement programmes and regular surveying for modernisation, repair and compliance work.



### **Treat you with respect as a valued customer.**

We actively work towards improved consumer standards for our tenants.



### **Be open and honest about how we are performing.**

We will publish our performance data quarterly, which will include how well we are doing on repairs, complaints and health and safety.

We will report annually on where your rent money is being spent.



### **Give all tenants a range of ways to have your voices heard and be able to hold us to account as your landlord.**

This includes our website, social media, face-to-face meetings, forums and panels. We will also send you newsletters and bulletins to update you on things that affect you as a tenant.



The tenant charter summarises your tenancy agreement by setting out our promises to you and what we ask in return.

To get this right, we worked with the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel and staff across the housing service on what should be included. We have used their feedback to create this charter.

In particular, we'd be really grateful if you could help us keep your home well maintained by reporting any repairs we are responsible for as soon as you become aware of them. Please also make sure any repairs you are responsible for are done promptly.

## Our vision for the housing service is:

To create an excellent, digitally enabled service that is easy to deal with and where tenants are at the heart of everything we do.

## In return, we ask you to:

▶ Pay your rent and any service charges on time, and let us know if you are struggling to do this and need any help or advice.

▶ Keep us informed about who lives in your home.

▶ Report any anti-social behaviour to us so we can deal with it promptly.

▶ If you have a garden keep it well maintained.

▶ Let us into your home to carry out important health and safety checks such as gas and electrical safety which we are legally required to carry out. Also let us in for repairs and inspections so we can make sure you are safe in your home.

▶ Tell us if you are going to be away from home for an extended period of time, otherwise we might think you have abandoned the property.

▶ Ask for our permission to keep a pet, and look after it responsibly.

▶ Use the property as your main home and not sublet it.

▶ Make sure you, your family and visitors don't cause a nuisance or harass your neighbours.

▶ Look after your home and carry out any repairs you are responsible for – this includes keeping your home in a good state of decoration.

▶ Tell us about any repairs or faults we are responsible for as soon as you are aware of them.

▶ Dispose of your rubbish in the correct bins for recycling, food, residual (landfill) and garden waste, or take large items to a Household Waste Recycling Centre.

▶ Give us at least four weeks' notice in writing if you want to end your tenancy. You must leave the property in good condition and make sure you have a clear rent account before you move out.

▶ Ask for our permission if you want to run a business from your home.

You can find all the information you need about your tenancy, including your rights and responsibilities and what the council is responsible for, at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenancy](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenancy).

## 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](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) to book an inspection with your neighbourhood surveyor.




# Our Annual Report 2022/23

## Repairs and Maintenance

The Regulator of Social Housing's Home Standard says it expects us to provide you with a good quality home and to offer value for money with our repairs and maintenance service.

### This year, we have:

 We have reroofed one block of 36 properties

 Spent £5.7 million on work to improve your homes, including replacing:

**138**  
kitchens



**132**  
bathrooms



**196**  
boilers



**57**  
electric heating and  
hot water upgrades



**154**  
windows and doors



**28**  
external doors



### How are we doing?

	Our target	Our result
Day-to-day repairs completed on time	90%	96%
Day-to-day repair appointments kept	95%	97%
Heating repairs completed on time	98%	98%
Heating repair appointments kept	98%	98%
Properties with a valid Landlord Gas Safety Record	100%	99%
Properties with a valid Electrical Certificate	100%	96%
Properties which are asbestos compliant	100%	100%
Lift services completed on communal lifts	100%	100%
Blocks with a valid fire risk assessment	100%	98%
Blocks with a valid water safety risk assessment	100%	100%

### Where we need to improve

Unfortunately we did not meet our target for all properties to have a gas safety check and certificate by 31st March 2023. However, this was partly due to no access to some properties and the changeover of the gas contract from Gas Call to Swale on 1st April.

We are working with Swale Heating to ensure these are completed as a priority. When we contact you to

say we need to carry out your annual gas safety check, please help us to keep you safe by allowing us access to complete the check.

At the end of March, only two properties were without a valid electrical certificate and three fire risk assessments were outstanding. These were all completed by the second week of April.



## Tenancy

The Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard says it expects us to let our homes fairly, transparently, and efficiently.

### This year, we have:



**Reduced the current tenant rent arrears owed to the council by more than £135,000 between September 2022 and March 2023.**



**175  
homes re-let**

### How are we doing?

	Our target	Our result
Average re-let time	25 days	25 days
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed	98%	98.94%
Current tenant rent arrears	2.3%	2.11%

### Where we need to improve

Although we met our targets in this area, the time taken to re-let empty homes increased towards the end of the year. This was partly caused by an increase in the number of re-lets and partly by a change in management at Mears. We are working with all teams and contractors involved in the re-letting process to speed things up.

It's important that we re-let homes as quickly as possible, both because of the large number of people waiting for a council home and to reduce the amount of rent the council loses while homes are empty.

If you are moving out of your home, please help us by

making sure it is in a good state of repair before you move, otherwise we may have to recharge you for some tenant responsibility repairs!

We met our target for current tenant rent arrears, but we realise many residents are struggling with money due to the cost-of-living crisis. We know nobody wants to be behind with their rent and we want to give all the advice and support we can. If you're struggling to keep up with your rent payments, please contact us – the quicker we know about it, the quicker we can help you.

## Neighbourhood and Community

The Regulator of Social Housing's Neighbourhood and Community Standard says it expects us to keep your estates and communal areas clean and safe, as well as working with others to promote wellbeing and deal with anti-social behaviour.

### This year, we have:



**Completed 225 wellbeing plans with tenants in our independent living (sheltered housing) schemes**



**Investigated 106 anti-social behaviour cases**

# Our Annual Report 2022/23

## How are we doing?

	Our target	Our result
Satisfaction with anti-social behaviour case handling	75%	40%
Satisfaction with anti-social behaviour case outcome	75%	40%

## Where we need to improve

Tenant satisfaction is hugely important to us, and we very much value your views. If you haven't yet completed this year's tenant survey, there's still time. Call us on 01303 853270 and we'll be happy to fill it in

over the phone with you – it will only take around 10 minutes of your time and we really want to hear what you think about the housing services we provide.

## ↔ Resident Involvement and Empowerment

The Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard says it expects us to give you the information you need, set out a clear approach to dealing with complaints and give you a wide range of ways you can get involved and influence the housing service.

## This year, we have:

▶ **Held six Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel meetings and six Independent Living Forum meetings**

▶ **Sent out two newsletters and two bulletins**

▶ **Dealt with 51 complaints**

## How are we doing?

	Our target	Our result
Overall satisfaction with the housing service	N/A	68%
Residents satisfied the council listens to and acts on their views	N/A	49%
Complaints responded to on time	95%	97%
Average time to respond to complaints	10 days	8 days

## Where we need to improve

We didn't have targets for satisfaction with the housing service, but we are aiming to improve on last year's satisfaction rates. We carried out another satisfaction survey earlier this year and we're currently going

through the data. We'll report the results of this year's survey and our planned action in the October bulletin.

We are also setting up a tenant scrutiny panel to look in detail at how we deal with complaints.



## Your voice, our action

Gathering the views of our tenants and leaseholders is important to shaping the service that we are delivering.

We want to hear your views and how you think we can improve the service. There are many ways and opportunities for you to have your say and influence decisions that are taken.

## Join our panel

Our Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) is recruiting new members. As a panel member you will be given an opportunity to help shape how the housing service is run.

You will join strategic level discussions, offering feedback on policies, procedures and strategies that affect the day to day lives of tenants.

Going forward we will be marking documents with a stamp, similar to that below, so you can see the items that the panel have given feedback about.

For more information:

☎ 01303 853723

✉ [tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)



## The Independent Living Forum (ILF)

The ILF has been running for many years and is solely focused on the residents and officers involved in this area of our housing service. The ILF has two representatives from each scheme. Meetings are attended by council officers and our contractors, such as Mears and Swale Heating, so that answers and further details can be sought immediately.

There are vacancies on the ILF for several schemes.

If you would like to hear more or would like to become a member, please

☎ 01303 853723

✉ [tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)



## Neighbourhood Inspections

Join the housing team on your local Neighbourhood Inspection. This is an opportunity for residents to share any concerns and help us identify problems in their area. As part of the inspection, you will be involved in checking the condition of your neighbourhood, buildings and communal areas. You can advise on issues such as caretaking, litter

and fly-tipping, as well as report any repairs in your neighbourhood. If a problem is identified team members will do their best to put it right.

Find out more about how to get involved

📄 [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/neighbourhood-inspections](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/neighbourhood-inspections)

# Working to improve your homes

This year's planned works programme has now been agreed. We will be carrying out a range of improvements to many council homes across the district, including:



Front entrance doors at **31 blocks**



Communal doors at **9 blocks**



Door entry systems at **27 blocks**



Doors and windows in **41 locations**



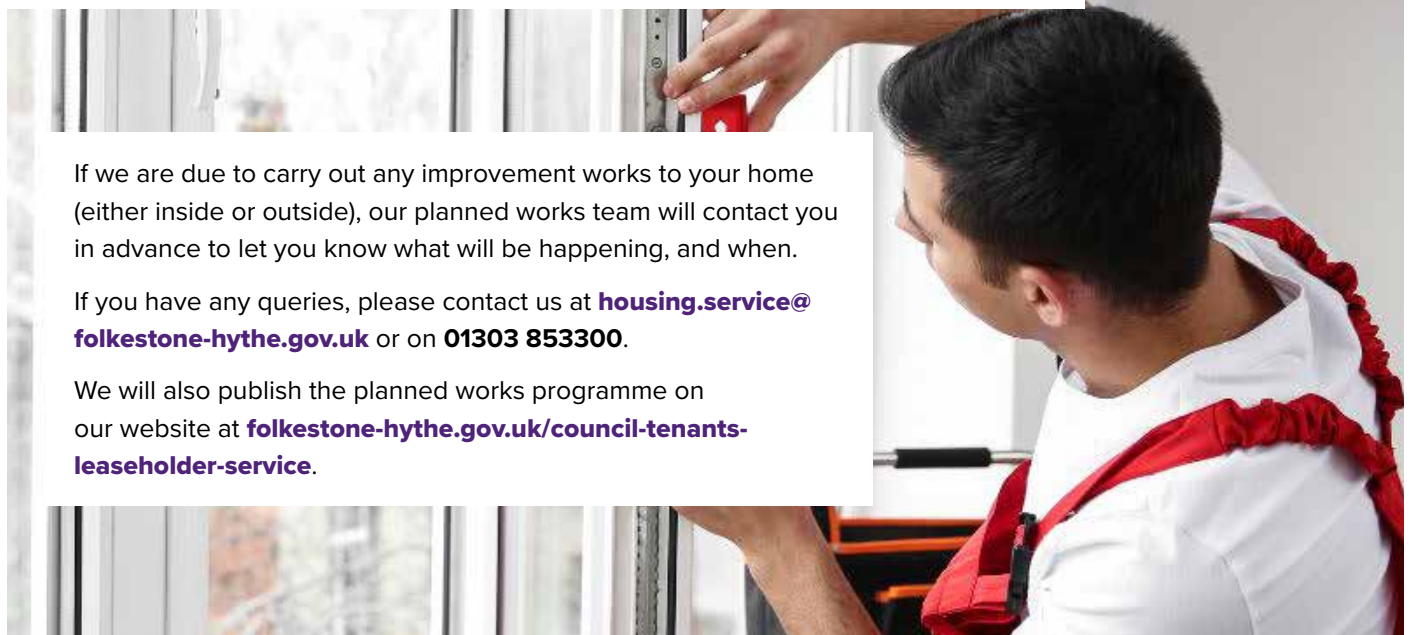
Roofing in **6 locations**



External decorations in **23 locations**



Other external work in **22 locations**



If we are due to carry out any improvement works to your home (either inside or outside), our planned works team will contact you in advance to let you know what will be happening, and when.

If you have any queries, please contact us at [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or on **01303 853300**.

We will also publish the planned works programme on our website at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service).

## Do you receive Tax Credits?

If you do, you will shortly receive a Migration Notice letter from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). When you receive this letter you must ensure that you make your new claim for Universal Credit by the deadline given. Failing to make your claim in time could result in loss of benefits and rent which could put you into rent arrears and even lose your transitional protection.

Visit Gov.Uk for more information or contact the council for advice on **01303 853300** or via webchat

# Housing Online



## Have you tried Housing Online?

Our Housing Online service has been live for over six months and here's just some of the feedback we've received from satisfied tenants.

“ Easy to navigate, comprehensive and in line with current times. It will save tenants time in phone calls”

“ It is great. After asking for it for many years I cannot find any fault with it”

Not only is our new service designed to save you time but if you sign up **before the 7 August** you could be in with a chance of winning a £100 decorating materials voucher.

Housing Online allows tenants to view and update information 24/7 via the MyAccount pages of the council website. The service provides quick and easy access at your convenience via a smartphone, PC or tablet. The online service will free up resources to support those who may benefit from additional assistance.

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](https://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 **input once**, from then on just a username and password will be required.



# 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:

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Council tax & council tax reduction

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Housing benefit

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Planning

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Parking

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Recycling, waste

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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 11 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 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday except Wednesday when it is 9.30am to 5pm.

## 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](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)

## Social media:

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

 **/FolkestoneandHytheDC**

 **@fstonehythedc**

 **Folkestone and Hythe District Council**

 **@folkestonehythedc**

### 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](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) to book an inspection with your neighbourhood surveyor.

