

July 2024

# TENANT NEWS

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# Welcome to the July edition of Tenant News

I hope you are all having a fantastic summer and enjoying everything our district has to offer.

I'd like to start by thanking everyone who has taken the time already to complete our tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey. It is important to us to find out what you think about the housing management service, so we can ensure your voices are heard and that your suggestions contribute to our action plan.

Involving tenants in the way the housing management service is run is very important to us. You can find our annual report in this edition of the newsletter. This gives an insight into how we have performed this year and what our plans are for the future.

You can also find out about our neighbourhood teams on pages 8 & 9. I would encourage you to attend your neighbourhood inspection if you haven't already. These inspections offer an opportunity to make your voice heard and to help bring about changes. Last year 137 of the 140 issues raised in the 2023 inspections were actioned or referred to other teams and agencies to deal with.



Speaking of change it has been fantastic to see the impact the changes have made to tenant homes as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). Wave 1 of the project was completed in March and we are already seeing an improvement in the wellbeing and comfort of our tenants. You can find out more on page 7.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter, I hope you enjoy it.

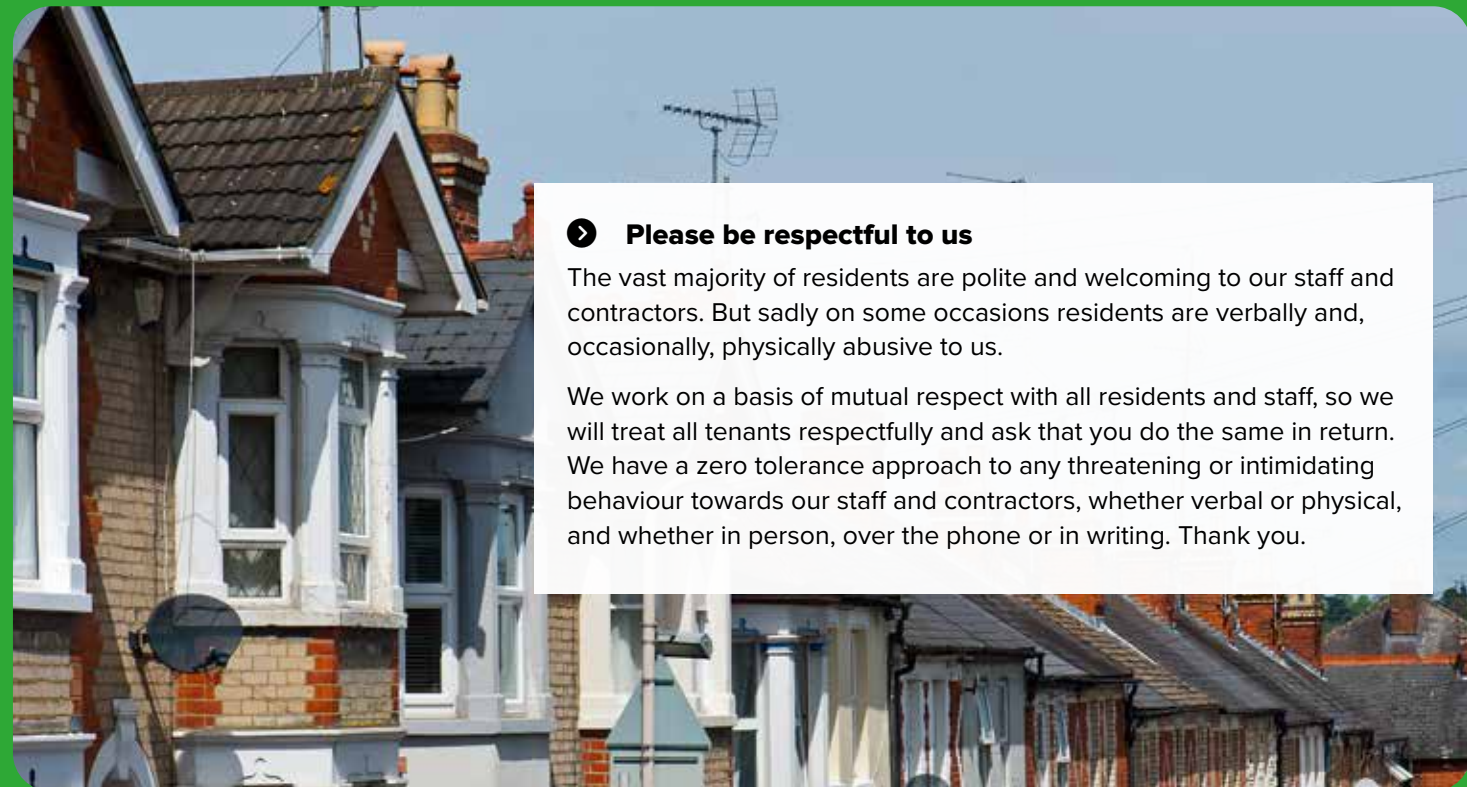
**Councillor Rebecca Shoob**

Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

## ➤ Please be respectful to us

The vast majority of residents are polite and welcoming to our staff and contractors. But sadly on some occasions residents are verbally and, occasionally, physically abusive to us.

We work on a basis of mutual respect with all residents and staff, so we will treat all tenants respectfully and ask that you do the same in return. We have a zero tolerance approach to any threatening or intimidating behaviour towards our staff and contractors, whether verbal or physical, and whether in person, over the phone or in writing. Thank you.



## Moving from analogue to digital telephone lines



Do you have a landline telephone in your home? If so, read on!

All telecommunication providers across the UK are replacing the technology they use to provide landline telephones.

The current system works on copper wires and analogue signals, which have been in operation for many decades and have now reached the end of their serviceable life, so the system will be retired over the next few years.

The industry will upgrade landline services to digital technology, using an internet connection to transmit landline telephone calls.

For most people, this change will be straightforward although it will depend whether you have the internet at home. If you don't and you don't want a high speed connection, some

providers will offer a simple internet connection so you can still make calls from a landline.

Your landline phone provider will contact you in advance of the migration taking place, so you don't need to do anything yet, other than be aware that this change is coming.

If the council provides a Lifeline in your home, this will also be affected by the change, but rest assured that we are taking steps to ensure that the system will still work after the switchover, and that tenants are not left without a working Lifeline at any point.

We are working on a project to replace the "hardwired" system (such as those in most of our Independent Living schemes) with a new digital system and if this affects you, we will keep you updated on what work will be taking place, and when.

## Join the 20% of tenants saving time with Housing Online

Housing Online enables tenants to access council services quickly and easily and if you sign up quickly you could be in with a chance of **winning a £100 voucher for decorating materials**.

Sign in to the tenant portal and you could be just like Anthony Pittam who won the voucher competition we held in our January edition of the newsletter.

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 inputted once, from then on just a username and password will be required.



## Mobility scooters

If you are thinking about getting a mobility scooter, or any other type of plug in electric scooter or bike, please remember that you need to ask our permission before buying one. This is so we can make sure that there is somewhere appropriate where you can store and charge it, without it being a fire hazard to you or to anyone else.



Let us know by emailing [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or by calling us on **01303 853300**.

## Report tenancy fraud

Tenancy fraud is a crime. If you suspect that a council tenancy is being sub-let or has been abandoned, please contact us in confidence at [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or on **01303 853300**.

# Our Annual Report 2023/24

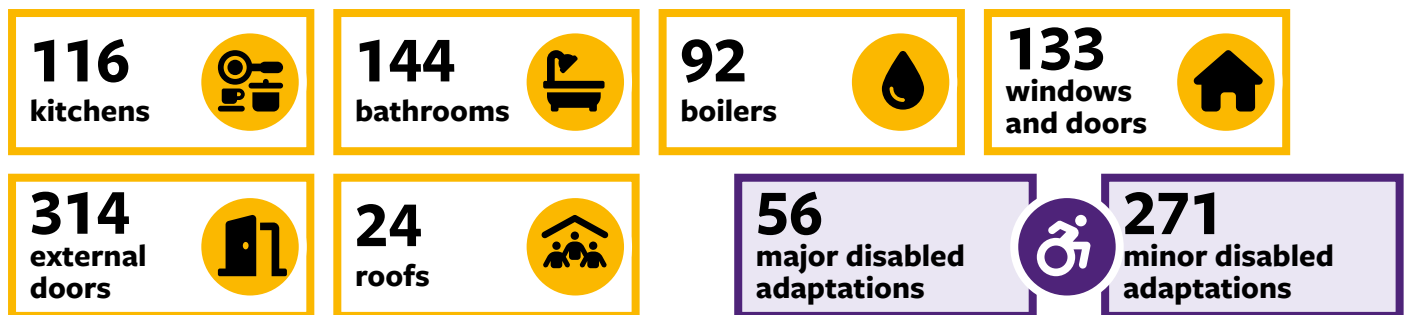
## Repairs and Maintenance

The Regulator of Social Housing's Safety and Quality Standard says it expects us to provide you with a good quality home, ensure your health and safety and provide an effective, efficient and timely repairs and maintenance service.

### This year, we have:

 Spent £8.3 million on work to improve your homes, including:

#### Replacements of



### How are we doing?

2023/24 performance

	Our target	Our result	Change from last year
Day-to-day repairs completed on time	90%	94.19%	-2%
Day-to-day repair appointments kept	95%	94.98%	-2%
Heating repairs completed on time	98%	95.99%	-2%
Heating repair appointments kept	98%	98.98%	+1%
Properties with a valid Landlord Gas Safety Record	100%	100%	+1%
Properties with a valid Electrical Certificate	100%	99.5%	+4%
Properties which are asbestos compliant	100%	100%	0%
Lift services completed on communal lifts	100%	100%	0%
Blocks with a valid fire risk assessment	100%	100%	+2%
Blocks with a valid water safety risk assessment	100%	100%	0%

### Where we need to improve

Keeping you safe in your homes is important to us and we are very pleased to report that we met nearly all our targets in this area – only narrowly missing our goal for day-to-day repair appointments kept, one of our key indicators.

At the end of March, there were 17 properties without a valid Electrical Certificate. This was partly


due to problems accessing these properties and we are working with these tenants to get the checks completed as a priority. When we contact you to say that your gas or electrical safety check is due, please help us to keep you safe by allowing us access to your home.

## Tenancy

The Regulator of Social Housing’s Tenancy Standard says it expects us to let our homes fairly and transparently, and support residents to maintain their tenancy.

### This year, we have:

 **Reduced the current tenant rent arrears owed to the council by more than £108,000 between September 2023 and March 2024**

  
**169**  
homes re-let

### How are we doing?

2023/24 performance

	Our target	Our result	Change from last year
Average re-let time	25 days	25.31 days	-1 day
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed	98%	99.54%	+1%
Current tenant rent arrears	3%	2.04%	0%

### Where we need to improve

We met our targets for rent collection. We were close to meeting our objective for re-letting empty homes, but just missed this as the time taken to re-let properties increased towards the end of the year.


We now have a dedicated neighbourhood surveyor who looks after all empty properties, which should


ensure properties are let more quickly in future. This is important because there is a huge number of people waiting for a council home, and we also need to minimise 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 and giving us notice before you leave.

## Neighbourhood and Community

The Regulator of Social Housing’s Neighbourhood and Community Standard says it expects us to ensure communal areas are kept safe, and to work with partners to promote wellbeing and tackle anti-social behaviour on estates that the council manages.

### This year, we have:

 **Completed 590 wellbeing plans with tenants in our independent living (sheltered housing) schemes**

 **Investigated 85 anti-social behaviour cases**

### How are we doing?

2023/24 performance

	Our target	Our result	Change from last year
Satisfaction with anti-social behaviour handling	N/A	54%	+3%

# Our Annual Report 2023/24

## Where we need to improve

Although we didn't set a target for satisfaction with how we handle anti-social behaviour, this is an important area for us to tackle. We were aiming to improve on the result from last year's tenant satisfaction survey and are pleased to report a 3% increase.

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has recently been reviewing our approach to anti-social behaviour and we will report their findings in a future issue of the newsletter. We have also recently consulted tenants on our new anti-social behaviour policy.

## ↔ Tenant Involvement and Complaints

The Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard says it expects us to take your views into account in our decision-making, ensure you understand what you can expect from us, allow tenants to hold us to account, and deal with complaints fairly and promptly.

## This year, we have:



**Held six Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel meetings**



**Started two Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews**



**Dealt with 82 complaints**



**Held four Independent Living Forum meetings**



**Sent out two newsletters and one bulletin**

## How are we doing?

2023/24 performance

	Our target	Our result	Change from last year
Overall satisfaction with the housing service	N/A	71%	+3%
Residents satisfied the council listens to and acts on their views	N/A	55%	+6%
Complaints responded to on time	95%	96.55%	0%
Average time to respond to complaints	10 days	6.54 days	-1 day

## Where we need to improve

We don't have a target for satisfaction, but we were aiming to improve on last year's satisfaction rates and are pleased to report a 3% increase in overall satisfaction and a 6% increase that we listen to and act on your views.

The Regulator of Social Housing expects us to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey every year. We will report the results of this year's survey, and what we plan to do about what you've told us, in the October tenant bulletin.

# Decarbonisation project success

“ I am now able to be in a nice warm home and it is reassuring not to have to choose between health and finances. ”

This is the view of tenant, Amanda French, whose home was part of the first wave of our Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Project (SHDF).

Amanda's home is just one of the 125 properties that were most in need of being brought up to date with a range of energy efficient measures making them cheaper to run for tenants.

The first wave of the SHDF was completed in March and tenants are already appreciating lower bills as a result of the new measures.

All 125 homes that were part of the project were upgraded from EPC ratings of between D and G, to ratings between A and C. The 125 homes had the following energy efficiency measures installed:

Energy efficiency measure	Number of properties
Ventilation	125
Loft insulation	100
Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels	87
Cavity wall insulation	43
External doors	26
High heat retention storage heaters	18
Air source heat pump	17
Underfloor insulation	6
Windows	4
Flat roof insulation	2



## What's next?

Property assessments for the next Wave of the government's SHDF funding have begun and will enable the council to improve the energy efficiency of a further 300 homes over the next two years.

The funding has again been matched by the council and will cost £5.2 million, bringing the total spend on improving the homes and wellbeing of tenants to £8.2million.

# The teams managing your area

## Your Neighbourhood Services team

The Neighbourhood Services team works to ensure that service requests and complaints are dealt with promptly and that any issues such as safeguarding, harassment or anti-social behaviour issues are promptly investigated. Alongside this they also deal with any tenancy matters and can refer tenants to other agencies for assistance.

**The team is led by Tom Harding, Neighbourhood Services Manager.** He also oversees the regular programme of estate inspections and manages our caretakers. Alongside this he oversees our cleaning contractors.

Listed below are areas your Neighbourhood Officers look after. You will often see them when they are out and about on your estates, but please remember that your first point of contact for any housing-related enquiries should always be to email [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or call our Customer Support team on **01303 853300**.

Neighbourhood Services Team Leader	Neighbourhood Officer	Areas covered
Vacant	Vacant	Lydd, Marsh Rural, St Marys Bay
	Kelly Flannery	Cheriton
	Debbie Helliwell	Dymchurch, Sandgate, Lympe, Burmash
	Nkoli Onyejeli	Hythe
Alex Stock	Margarita Gwanzura	North Folkestone and surrounding villages
	Hayley Kent	East Folkestone
	Mark Emerson	Central Folkestone and Harbour area

## The Independent Living team

The Independent Living team supports tenants over the age of 60 to continue living as independently as possible while providing them with an enhanced housing management service. **The team is led by Mike Bailey, Tenant Engagement & Wellbeing Manager.**

Independent Living Team Leader	Independent Living Officer	Schemes covered
Jan Hatcher	Lorraine Bailey	Bradford Court, Folkestone / Albert Costain Court / Folkestone and Stephen Court, Folkestone
	Irene Crowley	Mittell Court, Lydd / Prescott House, New Romney / Romney Marsh House, Dymchurch
	Caz Keem	Philippa House, Folkestone / Walmsley House, Folkestone
Jayne Lucas	Paul Gibbs	Middelburg House and Cheriton / Green Court, Folkestone / Stockham Court, Cheriton
	Gill Thomas	Mackeson Court, Hythe / Nailbourne Court, Lyminge
	John Rees	Churchill Court, Hythe / Halliday Court, Hythe / Win Pine House, Hythe



## Other specialist supporting teams

- **Richard Parker, Homeownership Specialist** who manages our leasehold properties and shared ownership and the Right to Buy scheme
- **Loren Paine, Tenant Liaison Officer** who works with our tenants and leaseholders
- **Rikki and Francis, Caretakers** who make sure the communal areas in our blocks of flats are clean and well maintained

## Meet the team



**We sat down with Debbie Helliwell one of our Neighbourhood Officers to get to know her a little better and find out more about her role in the housing management service.**

**You recently won the council's 'Employee of the Year' award, how did that feel?**

I felt completely overwhelmed to win Employee of the Year but incredibly delighted at the same time. My managers put me forward for this award following some very difficult cases that I had been involved with throughout the year, but on hearing the other nominations that were also in contention for this award, I was truly amazed that I had been selected.

It was important to me that although I was chosen for this award, my colleagues were also acknowledged, as we all work extremely hard as a team to ensure we give a good service to our tenants.

**What does a typical day involve?**

The role of Neighbourhood Officer is a varied one, every day is unique and can involve a number of different things from tenancy and estate

management to tenancy audit checks and anti-social behaviour investigations. We also work closely with other colleagues and external agencies to provide support and advice to our tenants when they require it.

Due to the nature of the job there is no such thing as a typical day; even though you may plan your day in advance, things more than often change at the last minute.

**What do you enjoy most about your role?**

One of the most enjoyable areas of my role is being able to help tenants in managing their tenancies. It is very rewarding to help support those tenants that want our assistance. This can often ensure they sustain their tenancy and remain in their homes.

**How long have you been with F&HDC?**

My career started back in 1988 working for Shepway District Council. I initially started working in the health and housing department within part of the administration team. This included helping to support both the environmental health officers and housing team. During this period, I experienced many different roles before progressing onto the role of Housing Officer. The role has changed immensely over the years much of this is due to the change in modern technology.

**Is there anything else you'd like tenants to know?**

Neighbourhood Officers try their best to support those tenants that need our help but unfortunately, we cannot agree to everything and at times cannot always fix your problems, but please be assured that we always try our hardest to do as much as we possibly can.

# Dealing with repairs

Timely repairs are important to make sure our tenants feel safe and secure in well-maintained homes. Our contractors have targets for responding to repairs, which vary, depending on the type and severity of repair.

Please note that emergency repairs are those which have the potential to cause danger to someone's health and safety or cause immediate serious damage and destruction to a property, home or building.

## Mears - Repairs & Maintenance contractor

Emergency	Urgent	Routine
4 hours, or 24 hours, depending on the issue	3 WORKING days	16 WORKING days

## Swale - Heating contractor

Emergency	Urgent	Routine
24 hours	7 CALENDAR days	14 CALENDAR days

Please also note that some repairs are your responsibility as a tenant. You can find out which repairs you are responsible for on our website at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-repairs](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-repairs).



## Reporting repairs

### For day-to-day household repairs:

- Log online via [Housing Online](#) our MyAccount platform on the council tenant section of the dashboard
- Call **Mears** on freephone **0800 313 4740**

### For gas, hot water or central heating repairs:

- Call **Swale Heating** on freephone **0800 987 4034**
- If you have an **air source heat pump**, please call **01303 853300**
- If you **smell gas**, please call the National Gas Emergency number on freephone **0800 111 999**

# Your rent and service charges

All tenants pay rent to the council, and depending on the home you live in, you may also pay service charges. It's important that you understand the differences between all the charges you need to pay to the council.

Your rent is what you pay the council to live in your property. The rent we collect allows us to provide the home you live in, general repairs, and the management of your tenancy.

**Service charges cover the cost of any service that is provided to communal areas of the building and/or estate where you live. Items covered as part of a service charge can include (but are not limited to):**



Also, depending on the building you live in, as part of your tenancy you may pay a charge for the use of other services which are for the direct benefit of your home. These services aren't the same as other service charges and can include (but are not limited to):



We are currently working on a project to make it clearer which services each tenant receives, and how much you pay for each individual service. This entails more accurate apportioning out or 'de-pooling' of service charges. As the project progresses you will be sent more information to explain what the changes will mean for you.

If you have any questions about the project or any of the information above, please contact us at housing. [service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or on **01303 853300**.

## What do you think of Tenant News?

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

## Want to get involved?

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.



# 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 3 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 10am - 4pm Monday to Friday

## 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

By email:

[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:

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

 [@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)

## 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.

