

February 2021

TENANT NEWS

Welcome
to our
newsletter

Results are in
from our tenant
and leaseholder
survey page 6

Meet Michelle,
our Independent
Living Manager
page 9



Folkestone
& Hythe

District Council



I hope you are all managing to stay safe and to keep well in these extraordinary and challenging times.

Back in October 2020 we launched the new housing service and set out our commitment to keep tenants at the heart of everything we do. Since then we have been working hard to deliver real improvements in the service you receive with involvement from as many of you as possible.

We have already run a couple of surveys and have taken your feedback on board. I hope that as many of you as possible will take part in our consultation

for our 'Tenant Engagement Strategy 2021-2024', which you can find on our website. You can find more about that and how you can get involved to help build a better and improved service later in the newsletter.

You do not need me to say just how difficult the past year has been for everyone as we continue to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. You will have seen differences in the way we provide our service to you while we ensure that the health and safety of everyone is managed as effectively as possible. I want to thank you for your understanding and for supporting our teams during this time.

Looking ahead, I also want to let you know that we are currently working out how we can safely hold the annual garden competition later this year, I know you will have missed this last year - we will of course let you know what is decided.

We hope you will find the information in this newsletter useful. If you have any feedback on the articles in this newsletter, please do get in touch by emailing tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk.

Councillor David Godfrey
Cabinet Member for Housing,
Transport and Special Projects

IN THIS ISSUE:

How we are improving	3
Stories from across the housing service	4-5
Results from our tenant survey	6
Meet the Tenant and Leaseholder Board	7
Taking care of our community	8
Day in the life of...	9
Advice and support available	10-11
Who to contact	12

Sign up to email

If you have an email address, please help us to cut down on paper waste by signing up to receive our newsletter by email. Help us to reduce our carbon footprint and sign up by selecting the option to receive newsletters by email by using our online form here <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/ways-to-get-involved>.

Privacy notice

Folkestone & Hythe District Council is the data controller for the council's housing service. This means we process and make decisions about your personal data for that purpose. For an explanation of how and why this data is used, please see our housing services privacy notice on the council website [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk).

GETTING IT RIGHT



Since we brought the housing service back in-house five months ago we have been working hard to deliver real improvements in the service you receive.

EMERGENCY AND ROUTINE REPAIRS COMPLETED ON TIME 99%



Working closely with our contractors, Mears, the time taken to complete a repair has been reduced by more than two days.

EMPTY PROPERTIES RE-LET 40



Since October we have re-let 40 empty properties and reduced our average re-letting time by three days.

PROPERTIES WITH COMPLETED GAS SAFETY CHECK 100%



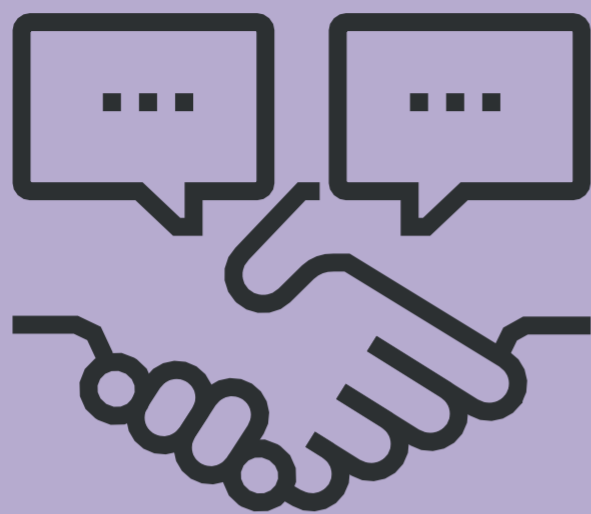
We have increased safety checks and as a result all tenant properties due to have an annual gas safety check by 31 December 2020 were completed on time. It is important that we check all council-provided gas appliances every year, to protect the safety of our tenants and ensure that every property is registered as 'gas-safe'.

RENT ARREARS AS A PERCENTAGE OF RENT DUE 2.57%



We have introduced a new dedicated team to our housing service who are focused on advising and supporting tenants experiencing difficulty in paying their rent. Thanks to this team the amount of money owed in rent arrears has reduced month-on-month since October, and is well within target.

We publish our housing service performance on our website each month. To read more please visit <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/performance-housing-service>.



Have your say on how your voice is heard

We want your views on our Tenant Engagement Strategy 2021-2024, which sets out a plan for how tenants and leaseholders can get more involved in the housing service - including how we provide our services, make decisions, and act on your feedback.

We have listened carefully to what you have said in recent surveys (see page 6), and worked closely with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board in partnership with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to create a programme that makes it as easy as possible for tenants to choose to participate as much or as little as they like.

Tenants sit at the heart of all we do so it is important to us that as many of you as possible let us know what you think. Read the full Tenant Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 and have your say at <https://service.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s35982/TES%20Action%20Plan%202021.pdf>.



Council clamps down on bad behaviour

We want you, your family, and neighbours to enjoy living in your home and community and we do not tolerate anti-social behaviour.

Our housing team works very closely with Kent Police and the partner agencies which make up the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to protect our tenants.

Most anti-social behaviour can be resolved informally but where necessary we take legal action, including evictions. The council recently issued closure notices to shut down two properties to prevent bad behaviour from continuing in the neighbourhood.

To report anti-social behaviour please contact us by using the information on the back cover of this newsletter. Your Neighbourhood Officer or Independent Living Manager will get back to you within five days, or much sooner if it is urgent, to talk to you in detail and to agree the next steps.

This will normally include you being asked to complete a 'diary' for two weeks to help us get a clearer picture of the type, frequency, and seriousness of the problems you are experiencing.

Checking your house, inside and out

We are planning to carry out a 'stock condition survey' of all council-managed properties during Spring/Summer 2021. This will help us understand where any improvements are needed, and if we can make changes that will help achieve the council's target to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Tenants will be contacted in advance of the survey with a suggested appointment date for our surveyors to visit. During the visit the surveyor will need access to all rooms, the loft and outside areas.

The surveyor will make notes and take photographs, with the full survey normally taking 30 to 40 minutes to complete. Surveyors will follow COVID-19 safety guidance at all times.

How can we make your space great?

Do you have an idea for a project that could make a difference to the area where you live? Let us know and the council could help make it happen.

We are inviting our tenants and leaseholders to let us know their ideas for future Environmental Improvement Projects so we can help make your neighbourhoods look and feel the best they can be.

Some examples of projects that have been funded previously include:

Building new bin areas to improve the look of rubbish storage areas.

Installing fencing or bollards to protect grassed areas from being parked on.

Improving communal patio areas to make them more accessible for our tenants (see photos left and below of Nailbourne Court, Lyminge).

Putting benches in a communal garden or on a grassed area.

Before



After



For more information on the types of project we are able to support, or to send us an idea, please visit our website at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-repairs/environmental-improvement-eip>. If you would like to request a paper copy of the submission form please contact us in the usual ways found on the back cover of this newsletter.

You gave us your views

More than 550 of you took part in our tenant and leaseholder survey at the end of 2020 and told us what you thought about the housing service you have received over the past 12 months. We want to thank those that took part in this and other recent surveys. Your feedback is so important to us as it helps shape how we run the housing service.

SERVICES

62% of you are satisfied that your landlord is easy to deal with

PRIORITIES

Improving repairs and maintenance is the most important aspect of the service for you

NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES

One in ten of you are affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB)

GETTING INVOLVED

One in four of you are interested in getting more involved in having a say on how the housing service is run



You told us your priorities, and here's what we are doing

We have been looking at the results, together with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board, to create an action plan of what is being done this year to make our housing service the best it can be. You can read some of the key outcomes of the survey below.

You said that 62% of you are satisfied that your landlord is 'easy to deal with'.

We will improve the time it takes to get back to you by setting up customer service training for our team who regularly deal with tenants, and aim to introduce 'mystery shoppers' to regularly monitor the service we provide.

You said that improving repairs and maintenance is the most important aspect of the service for you.

We will work with our contractors, Mears, to improve further the time it takes to respond to and complete a repair, and keep you better informed about your repair. We will monitor feedback given via a Mears customer satisfaction survey sent after each appointment (read more on page 11).

You said that one in four of you are interested in getting more involved in having a say on how the housing service is run.

We will continue to follow up with everyone who said they are interested in joining a tenant group to give you more information. We have also worked closely with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board to produce a Tenant Engagement Strategy which includes various ways that tenants can engage with the council and have their views listened to. You will have read on page 4 of this newsletter that we are asking for your views on this - please let us have your feedback.

You said that one in ten of you are affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB).

We will develop a satisfaction survey for tenants to complete after an ASB case has been dealt with and the feedback will be used to review our service and performance. We do not tolerate anti-social behaviour and work closely with Kent Police and other agencies to protect our tenants.

Meet our Tenant and Leaseholder Board



Our Tenant and Leaseholder Board is a local group of Folkestone & Hythe District Council tenants and leaseholders who represent the views and interests of tenants and leaseholders across the district. They make sure that

the tenant's voice is heard and assists in shaping our housing service.

As for many of us, holding virtual meetings was new to the board but their members have embraced new technology which has enabled the group to continue to run during the pandemic.

Elaine Bostock, Chairperson of the Tenant and Leaseholder Board, said: "Being part of the Tenant and Leaseholder Board gives us a bigger profile and louder voice that the council should listen to, we are their moral compass to do the best for all tenants. I've been the Chairperson for many years and in my time I've attended conferences with housing ministers to get our voice heard".

Would you like to have your say on how the housing service is run?

If you would like to join our Tenant and Leaseholder Board, or get more involved in other ways, please complete our online form at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenancy/get-involved](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenancy/get-involved). Or write to the Tenant Liaison Officer (address details on the back cover of the newsletter) and we'll get back to you to let you know more information.

Fellow board member, George Alexander, said: "I think it's a big responsibility to be entrusted with the role of seeking answers and resolutions for the tenants. As a member of the board it's important to have the skill to always be able to see the bigger picture and not just be concerned with issues that are affecting you directly."

Gillian Jenkins, also a member of the board, said: "I joined the board because I wanted to be in a position to have a say on what goes on around me and help solve issues that would be of great benefit to the whole district, not just me. I've been able to raise important issues like the best use of green space, parking, and overcrowded roads - which have been acted on."

Taking care of our community

Help us keep your community clean

We hate to talk rubbish, but fly-tipping and not using communal (shared) bin areas properly is a growing problem that is making a mess in our neighbourhoods. Please help us to keep your areas safe and looking good for everyone.

The increasing time and money needed to clear dumped rubbish each year is taking our neighbourhood officers away from other important jobs in the community, like taking care of repairs. But by working together we can make your neighbourhood a cleaner and safer place to live.

- If you live in an area with communal bins please always put your refuse in the bin and not on the floor next to it – this ensures the rubbish is taken away.
- Did you know that if waste that cannot be recycled gets put in a recycling bin, the crew will not empty it? It's helpful to remind yourself what to put in each bin at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/recycling](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/recycling).
- If you have any large, unwanted items you can take them to one of Kent County Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres – these are open for socially-distanced use if you book a slot before visiting. Or book a council collection at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/recycling-waste-bins/bulkywaste-collection>.
- If you see anyone dumping rubbish where you live please report it to us. Your details will be kept confidential.
- If you see any fly-tipped rubbish, or that a bin area is not being used as it should be, please report it to us.



Lifeline365: serious about your safety

Our Lifeline365 services can be used 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by lots of different people wanting the comfort of knowing that someone is there to help at any time - from key and essential workers travelling during the early mornings or late at night, those going out exercising, as well as elderly residents.

Equipment - including sensors and alarm push buttons - can be installed at home, while GPS enabled devices are available for when you're out and about. And we can still talk to you if you don't have a mobile phone.

For more information, visit [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/lifeline](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/lifeline) or contact our team on 01303 242615.

Lifeline365 is an accredited service provider of the Telecare Services Association.

Sign up to vote by post this year

The following elections are taking place on Thursday 6 May 2021:

- Police and Crime Commissioner election
- Kent County Council elections
- Folkestone Council ward of Folkestone Town Council by election
- Sandgate Village ward of Sandgate Parish Council by election
- New Romney Town ward of New Romney Town council by election

If you feel anxious about leaving home at the moment you could consider a postal vote. Please contact the elections team on 01303 853497 or at elections@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk to request a postal vote application form.

Applications for postal votes must be received by 5pm on Tuesday 20 April 2021. If you are not already registered to vote in these elections you must apply to register by midnight on Monday 19 April 2021.

Suggestions, compliments or complaints about the Housing Service

We are committed to providing a high level of service at all times. If you would like to highlight an area where things have gone well or tell us when you are dissatisfied with the service you have received please visit our website <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-information>.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...



Michelle Streeter is an Independent Living Manager supporting tenants in our semi sheltered and sheltered schemes. We caught up with her to ask what a typical day involves, and to get to know her a little better.

How do you start your day?

I usually get up at 6am to take my dog, Ivy, for a walk before work. I fostered her at the beginning of this year – she's deaf and quite nervous so this routine helps her to keep growing in confidence. I get into work at around 8:30am and make my first priority to call tenants to make sure they're ok, especially those needing a little more support.

What does a typical day involve?

Health and safety checks are a key part of each day – this involves me walking round the scheme buildings carrying out maintenance checks and reporting any repairs that need doing, to make sure everything is safe and sound for our tenants.

Dealing with tenant queries is of course an important part of my role, these can cover anything from rent issues, to booking in health care visits. COVID has definitely increased the number of questions coming from tenants, mostly looking for advice and extra reassurance which I think we all need right now.

What challenges has COVID presented for your role?

There's additional health checks that we need to carry out in a shorter timeframe to make sure we minimise the time spent outside our homes - it's an added pressure squeezing it into one day but I know it's important. Wearing PPE has its challenges! Wearing masks isn't fun for any of us, but of course we persevere to protect our tenants.

I really miss the face to face contact with tenants, it's just not the same. But we make it work with regular phone calls to make sure they're ok. I also make sure those tenants without a family are keeping themselves fed and hydrated and taking their medication.

We've heard from one particular tenant who you helped through COVID, tell us about that?

A tenant was concerned she might have COVID, so I arranged for an at-home test as she didn't have internet access. Unfortunately the test came back positive. I knew the tenant suffered with anxiety so I wanted to do all I could to support her during this difficult time. I phoned her every day, including weekends, to check in and offer reassurance and arranged for delivery of her food shopping and medication with the Community Hub team. She was very thankful and wrote to me saying: "Thank you so much for being my life saver. I don't think I could have survived this ordeal without you."

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I love the variety! No two days are the same and it's a constant learning curve which is what I love. I also enjoy the people - I like to help people and that's what we do.

How long have you been with F&HDC?

I've been with F&HDC for 4 years and before that I worked at Canterbury City Council and EKH so I've actually been with the housing service for just over 10 years now!

What do you like to get up to outside of work?

I'm the captain of an all-female bat and trap team, it's my greatest passion and I've played since I was 18 – that's 20+ years now! We're a very close team and go on holidays together. I also love my pets - I take my dog to training sessions and enjoy caring for my pair of parrots. They're actually named after a long-term tenant and colleague of mine, Bob and Beanie! I guess that says it all about what my job means to me!

Have you got any tips for lockdown?

Ask for help if you are struggling. Find lightness and humour in each day. Remind yourself this is temporary. Note the good in the world.

ADVICE & SUPPORT

HERE ARE SOME QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT:

Direct Debits: To arrange a Direct Debit please call the housing team on **01303 853300** and we can arrange this over the phone.

Smartphone App: Download the free allpay App from the App store to make rent payments anytime, anywhere.

Text Payments: To make a payment via text please register online at www.allpayments.net, all you need is an allpay swipe-card and a debit or credit card.

If you feel you would benefit from advice about rent, benefits, debt, or budgeting you can self-refer via our website <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/us/ways-to-contact> or call **01303 853000** to arrange for our Benefits & Money Adviser to contact you.

Need independent housing advice or help with other bills?

You can get free, impartial advice from a number of organisations, including:

- The Citizens Advice Bureau: visit citizensadvice.org.uk or call **0344 411 1444**
- Step Change debt charity: visit stepchange.org or call **0800 138 1111**
- The National Debt Line: visit nationaldebtline.org or call **0808 808 4000**
- Kent Savers Credit Union: visit kentsavers.co.uk or call **0333 321 9050**

Support in a crisis

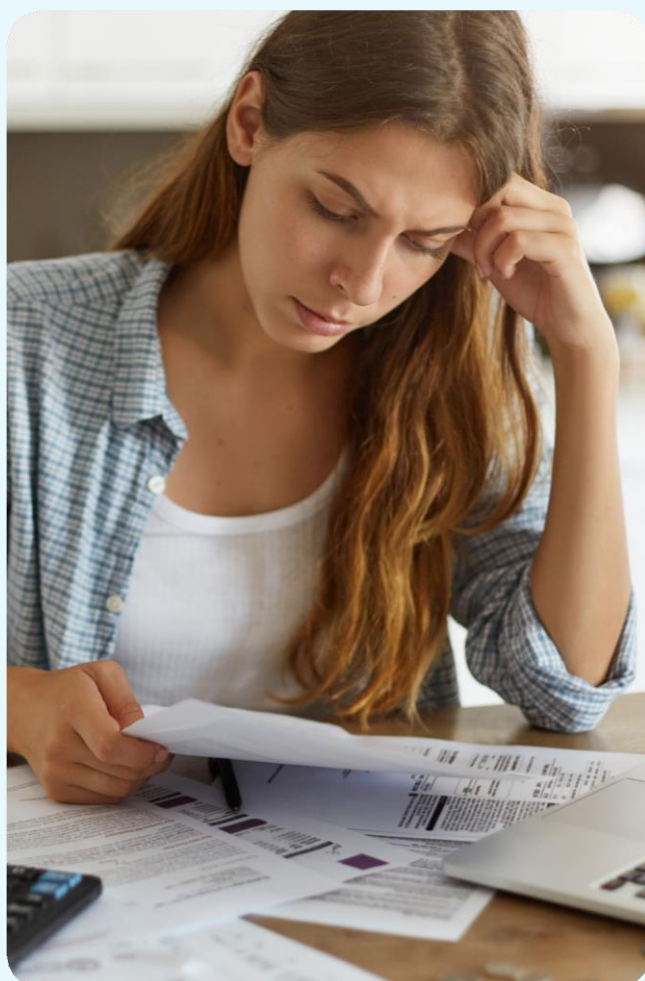
Support for families and anyone struggling to buy food or keep warm this winter is available in the Folkestone & Hythe district.

Due to COVID restrictions, food banks in Folkestone, Romney Marsh and Lydd are not open to visit but can deliver food parcels direct to anyone referred to them. Citizens Advice on **01303 241435** can help put people in touch with food banks.

The district has received a share of the government's COVID Winter Grant Scheme and is working with local organisations, including Citizens Advice, food banks and the community support hubs, to contact the vulnerable and those most in need, to help them pay utility bills or buy food over the winter.

The district's £75,000 share of the funding is available until the end of March 2021 or until all the money has been distributed. The organisations which will be giving out the district funding will be contacting those in need but more information can be found here folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/financial-support.

If you would like to speak to someone about money concerns you can contact our Benefits & Money Adviser. You can self-refer by calling **01303 853000** to arrange for the adviser to contact you.



TOP TIPS FOR REDUCING THE RISK OF FIRE



Fire safety is a top priority and there is lots we can all do to make sure that homes are safe and the risk of a fire starting is reduced.

WE WILL:

- Make sure all new windows and front doors meet the latest safety standards.
- Ensure gas boilers, pipework and other gas appliances are safety checked annually and before a new tenant moves in.
- Inspect your home's electrical installation every five years and upgrade where required.
- Make regular inspections in our blocks of flats and independent living schemes and carry out the full Fire Risk Assessments every 1 – 3 years.
- Remove items from communal areas which must be kept clear to allow easy exit in the event of fire.

YOU CAN:

- Make sure cigarettes are always put out and disposed of safely.
- Be careful with candles, keeping them away from furniture and curtains.
- Keep all electrical appliances clean, free from grease and in good working order.
- Ensure a deep fat fryer is only a third full of oil when in use.
- Use a spark device rather than matches to light a gas cooker.

For more information about staying safe in your home and a video take a look at the Kent Fire and Rescue website kent.fire-uk.org/your-safety/home-safety/

REMEMBER TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Our contractors need your feedback to make sure they are delivering the best service possible. Comments are really appreciated by the team as they can use them to resolve issues and continuously improve their performance.

Mears, our repairs contractor, is encouraging all customers to take some time to complete a short customer satisfaction survey – a link to which will be sent in a text message following an appointment, so it is important that Mears has your up to date mobile phone number.

Mears Regional Director Karen Beckley said: "Due to the pandemic the way in which we collect customer satisfaction feedback has changed. This system is very new and I would urge that if you receive the link please have a look and let us know what you think."

During lockdown Mears teams have been working hard to continue with repairs and maintenance. When booking an appointment you will be asked routinely whether anyone in your household is isolating and sometimes staff themselves may have to isolate in which case appointments may have to be cancelled at short notice.

Remember you can contact Mears on 0800 3134740 and the call is free. You may have to hold as during the pandemic Mears has been receiving high volumes of calls.

Reporting home repairs under COVID-19

As always, we are committed to ensuring that you have a safe place in which to live. Our council officers and contractors are following government COVID-19 guidance on working safely in people's homes so we can safely visit properties to carry out inspections and repairs. Please continue to let us know if there is a problem as early as possible, and allow us access to your property so we can carry out the necessary maintenance.

When reporting a repair please let us know if you or someone in your household falls within a clinically extremely vulnerable group - our council officers and contractors will pay specific attention to ensure the safety of those who have declared themselves as particularly vulnerable.

For more information please visit our website at **(Deprecated)**.

Contact your housing team

The Civic Centre is closed to visitors currently due to COVID-19 but there are a number of ways to contact us:

Online:

You can get in touch with us 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the council website [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)

By telephone:

Call us on **01303 853000**. 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

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 <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccount-information>

Social media:

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

Facebook: [/FolkestoneandHytheDC](https://www.facebook.com/FolkestoneandHytheDC)

Twitter: [@fstonehythedc](https://twitter.com/fstonehythedc)

LinkedIn: [Folkestone and Hythe District Council](https://www.linkedin.com/company/folkestone-and-hythe-district-council)

Instagram: [@folkestonehythedc](https://www.instagram.com/folkestonehythedc)

