

October 2021

TENANT NEWS

Welcome
newsletter

Read about
work on your
homes

Find out how
we can
help you



Folkestone
& Hythe



District Council

As we look back on our first year of the landlord service being back with the council I think we can say it has been quite a year!

Since taking back control on 1 October 2020 we have been in and out of lockdown. Our lives have been hugely changed by the restrictions to help stop the spread of Covid and many of us have had to cope with being ill, looking after those who have been ill and the great sadness of losing loved ones to the disease.

But through the difficulties there has been an outpouring of support for those facing challenges during the pandemic. I know that many of you were involved in not only helping your own families but also extending that support to your neighbours and those in the community who were struggling. This was wonderful to see and to hear about and a bright spot in what have been very uncertain times.

During this difficult year a new team of housing staff has been created to run your landlord service. This team has really pulled together. For many months they were meeting each other remotely via computer or telephone, but at the same time managing to build a service which is properly fit for purpose and set us off on our journey to create a truly world-class housing service. There is no doubt that this is a challenging and ambitious target but one that we are striving daily to reach.

It is fitting, therefore, that we end our first year on a high note for the team and for you - our tenants and leaseholders. The regulatory notice imposed by the government's Regulator of Social Housing in September 2019, when the service was being run by East Kent Housing, was lifted at the end of August. This is a major milestone to have been reached. It shows that the service we have been turning round and investing in is making sure your homes are safer.

We know that there is much more work to do and I can reassure you that the team is pushing forward with improvements and new ideas.



When we announced the lifting of the regulatory notice in August I was heartened by the words of Elaine Bostock, chairperson of the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel. She responded to the news by saying "Where there is a will, there is a way and I believe the housing team is on the right track and is committed to providing a great service for its tenants."

Tenants are at the heart of everything we do and I hope that following the setting up of the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel you will take up opportunities to join its sub groups. Finally a big thank you to all those who have worked with us and will continue to do so. As the Atkins family (see below) blow out our first birthday candle we are certainly looking forward to the next 12 months with you.

Councillor David Godfrey
Cabinet Member for Housing
and Special Projects



What do you think of our newsletter?

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

Or, if you would be interested in joining a small online group of tenants to advise and give feedback on all our communications, please email us at tenantinvolvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Credits

Photographs in the newsletter supplied by [@AndyAtchison](https://www.instagram.com/AndyAtchison) and members of the housing team

Highview

A new development in Folkestone is setting the standard for future building in the district.

The homes, which are about to be built on the former Highview school site in Moat Farm Road, are all for affordable rent and when complete, aim to be zero carbon in use.

The council's new-build team has, for the first time, been joined by three tenants who have been assisting us looking at various aspects of the development including different ways of ensuring the homes substantially reduce carbon emissions and are accessible

The zero carbon in use initiatives include: mechanical ventilation with heat recovery systems (MVHR), photovoltaics (solar panels), battery power storage (which links with the panels), and air source heat pumps (ASHP).

Work is expected to start on Highview's 24 houses and six flats (which include wheelchair-compliant units) early in 2022. The fully-accessible small neighbourhood will have open spaces with child-friendly landscaping, forming a sense of place. It will be connected to surrounding streets, with an emphasis on the movement of pedestrians, rather than vehicles.



New drop in sessions

Advice and support - or simply a cuppa and a biscuit - are available to veterans and their families at Armed Forces drop-in sessions in Folkestone.

Held at the Folkestone Town Hall from 10am to noon on the last Friday of the month, the meetings are run by Folkestone & Hythe District Council and are friendly, informal and free. All ex-service personnel are welcome.

Just pop in to the sessions or if you would like to find out more please email:

armedforces@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Wow – your gardens have been spectacular this year!

We are only sorry that the difficulties created by the Covid pandemic made it just too difficult to get a garden competition off the ground.

But we know the green-fingered among you love a bit of Gardener's World coming to Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh.

So, next year we are determined that the competition will be held.

No dates as yet but we thought a little advance warning might just influence any autumn planting you were planning!



Tenant Engagement Strategy

Getting involved

Tenant Liaison Specialist Loren Paine tells us about the new Tenant Engagement Strategy (TES).

The TES sets out our plans and intentions for the housing service and envisages how we will communicate and act on the tenants' voice.

Within the strategy is a clear structure of the tenant engagement channels available and how they tie in to the housing service. This can be a very light touch, such as following social media platforms or joining us for a virtual coffee.

Communication is key with our tenants, whether that is seeing them through the transition to us as their landlord, to planning new eco-friendly estates and neighbourhoods, to ensuring value for money and holding us to account if we fail to deliver on our pledges.

The goal for the next year is to have the tenant engagement structure firmly in place and our strategic panel successfully up and running. This will efficiently scrutinise the service, steer us towards improvement and highlight areas that need change.

Find out more

You can read our tenant engagement strategy here ([Deprecated](#))



Out and about with you in your neighbourhoods

Residents and ward councillors have been joining us on many of our neighbourhood inspections over the summer and we hope that you have found them useful.

The aim of the inspections is to hear first-hand what you feel is working well and what needs more attention and to see it for ourselves.

Since May we have carried out 20 inspections across the district. We have identified lots of 'quick-fixes' - repairs and other issues that we can deal with straight away, such as damaged garden walls, blocked gutters and dumped rubbish.

We have also identified other works that will take a bit longer to deal with. For example as a result of the neighbourhood inspections we are putting together a programme of footpath repair works.

There are more inspections planned during the autumn and winter months and should you see us around and about please come and say hello and let us know about any issues in your local community.



Improving your home

We understand how important repairs are to tenants, and we work hard to get it right. Here's some key information about our 2020/21 repairs performance.

REPAIRS

7,399

repairs were completed with 99.26% completed on time

99.76%

of emergency repairs were completed on time

97.76%

of repair appointments were kept

99.14%

of routine repairs were completed on time

86.28%

of repairs were completed on first visit

79%

of tenants who responded to post-repair surveys were satisfied with their repair and the service provided

HOW WE KEEP YOU SAFE IN YOUR HOMES

100%

of properties had a gas safety check completed by 31 March 2021

100%

of blocks had new risk assessments completed for fire, asbestos and water safety

97%

of heating and hot water repairs were completed on first visit

88%

of blocks received a new electrical safety certificate

100%

of domestic and communal lifts were serviced

94%

of blocks had their fire alarm serviced

Last year we undertook new health and safety risk assessments for fire, asbestos and water safety. Improvement actions have been prioritised and planned for completion in the coming year.

We also began a programme to replace or improve 230 fire doors and carry out electrical safety checks in all our properties. Both are planned for completion in the coming year.

An audit inspection of health and safety compliance awarded the council with 'substantial assurance' that we are keeping your homes safe.

Our major works programme is vital to maintain the quality of our homes. The 2020/21 programme represented an investment of £3.5M, an increase from £2.9 million the previous year.

Here's a quick snapshot of our upgrade work in homes across the district.

23

kitchens renewed (approx.) at a total of £105K

49

bathrooms renewed (approx.) at a total of £129K

£3.5M

spent in total on planned maintenance and upgrade

93

properties benefitted from re-roofing work at a total of £700K

225

boilers installed, as well as other heating improvements at a total of £478K

80

properties had windows and/or doors replaced at a total of £302K

AVERAGE RE-LET TIME (DAYS)

28.05 days

Last year we re-let 169 properties and carried out major improvement works in 70 of them

The time taken to re-let standard properties was 28 days in 2020/21. Whilst this is longer than the previous year (19.6 days,) Covid-19 restrictions had a big impact on our ability to re-let homes quickly.

RENT COLLECTION AND ARREARS

100% rent collected

2.03% rent arrears

We collected 100% of rent and service charges due for the year in 2020/21. The amount of historic current tenant arrears also reduced to 2.03% from 2.21% the previous year (a reduction of approx. £27K).

COMPLAINTS

95% of complaints responded to on time

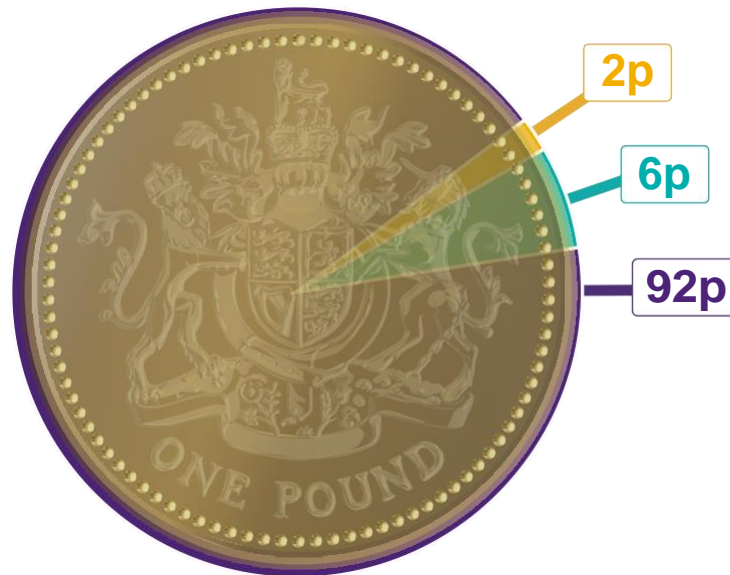
We are committed to listening to tenants and acting on feedback to improve our services. Last year we responded to 95.16% of landlord complaints within 10 working days, with an average response time of 7.79 days.

We received

- 62 formal complaints
- 61 of these were resolved at stage 1
- 1 complaint was escalated to stage 2 and to the Housing Ombudsman

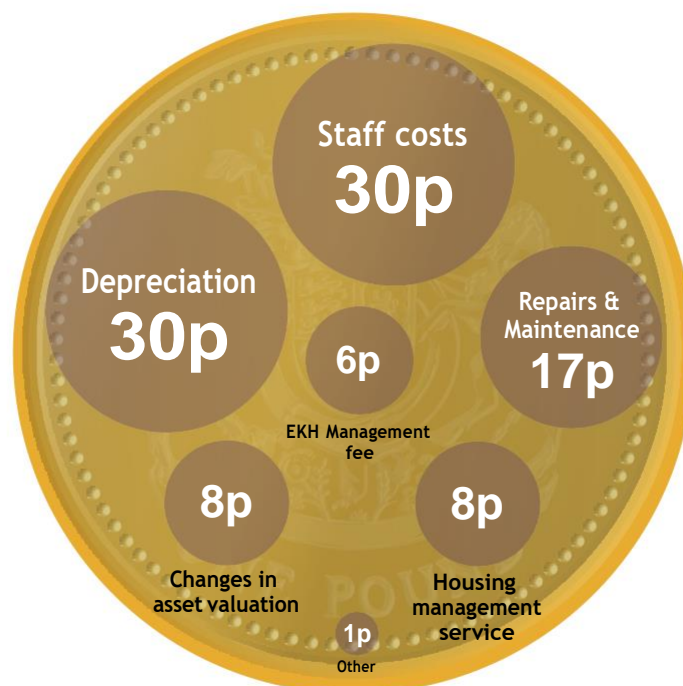
Financing our landlord service

WHERE EACH POUND CAME FROM 2020/21



■ Non dwelling rent ■ Service charge ■ Dwelling rent

HOW EACH POUND WAS SPENT 2020/21



Volunteers tidy up

A green-fingered bunch from our Asset and Major Works team and contractors rolled up their sleeves and got stuck in to tidying up communal gardens in four of Folkestone's independent living schemes.

Bradford Court, Walmsley House, Philippa House and Green Court all benefited from the weeding, pruning and sweeping make-over.

Benches and lamp posts were painted by Bell Group. Mears staff installed water butts and compost bins and took away mountain of rubbish and PRC Ltd replaced trellis fencing at Philippa House. All contractors provided services free of charge.

The team spent their council community volunteering day on the project which was the brainchild of Nicola Phipps (who is pictured broom in hand).

She explained: "As a new team we've only managed to meet up face to face a couple of times during the pandemic, so this was a good opportunity to get to know each other better outside a work setting as well as help our residents to enjoy the gardens a little bit more."



Advice & Support

Working with you

We understand that reaching the end of the furlough scheme and the Universal Credit uplift may create financial difficulties for some.

We want to do all that we can to support you, so **if you are unable to pay your rent, please contact us immediately to discuss your situation**, and we will work with you to address any issues.

You can speak to an Income Officer on 01303 853300 or alternatively email housing.income@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk.

If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties, we can discuss a payment plan and signpost you to the relevant team to help you claim financial support and benefits.

If you are paying your rent at a Post Office or PayPoint, you may want to consider setting up a direct debit to make these payments. This method of payment is also suitable for those on a payment plan.

If your income has been reduced, you may be entitled to claim Universal Credit or other benefits. This may include help with your rent payments. If you think you are entitled to any support, please get in contact with us as soon as possible.



Here are some quick and easy ways to pay your rent:

- **Direct Debits:** To arrange a Direct Debit please call the housing team on 0130 385 3300 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.



We have a committed Benefits & Money Advisor to help you if you are struggling with rent, benefits, debt and/or budgeting. If you feel you would benefit from this service contact us on **01303 853300** to arrange for the Benefits & Money Advisor to contact you.

Insurance

Whether you have just moved into your place or been there for a while, live in a flat, house or sheltered accommodation, home contents insurance is a must-have.

Providing cover for furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments, it gives you peace of mind should the worst happen.

It sounds dramatic, but if your washing machine was to leak and ruin your flooring, or if the flat upstairs flooded and damaged your furniture and wallpaper, could you afford to replace, repair or redecorate?

Home contents insurance can be taken out through our pay-as-you-go scheme and paid weekly alongside your rent, or by making your own arrangements.

Specifically designed for tenants and residents in social housing, our scheme is run by Thistle Insurance. It covers:

- Theft, water damage, fire and many more household risks
- Improvements up to £2000 or 20% of the sum insured (whichever is the greater)
- Theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)
- Damage to external glazing for which you are responsible.
- Replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen. You don't need to have special door or window locks (just a lockable front door).

For more details, contact Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Housing Service: housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk, 01303 853000.

Further information is available here:

<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service>

Important survey of all your homes

We have been knocking on many of your doors over the last months whilst we undertake an important survey of the condition of all your homes.

Tenants have been contacted in advance with suggested appointment dates and a big thank you to all those who have made it easy for surveyors to come round and make their checks.

We want to make sure that we have the most accurate and up to date information about our housing so that all the work necessary is given the correct priority during future years.

The information collected will also enable us to look at energy levels and how we can work towards reducing carbon emissions over the coming decade.

Contact your housing team

Online:

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

f /FolkestoneandHytheDC

in @fstonehythedc

Folkestone and Hythe District Council

l @folkestonehythedc

Or join the Facebook group for tenants and leaseholders:

f /groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders

