

October 2020

# TENANT NEWS

**Welcome  
to your new  
Housing  
Service!**

**Hear about  
our plans for  
the future**

**Find out how  
you can get  
involved**



**Folkestone  
& Hythe**



District Council



**Pictured:**

Chair of the Shepway Tenant and Leaseholder Board Elaine Bostock (centre) with (right) Councillor David Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport, and Special Projects and (from left) Susan Priest, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service; Andy Blazkowitz, Director - Housing & Operations, and John Holman, Assistant Director of Housing.

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# Welcome



We want to take this opportunity to welcome you to your new Housing Service.

When tenants and leaseholders are advised that their landlord will be changing, it can be a worrying time that may generate a lot of questions. As Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC) brings the Housing Service back in-house we want to reassure you of our dedication to delivering an excellent service.

East Kent Housing has been responsible for delivering the Housing Service since April 2011. However, as of the 1 October 2020, the council is directly responsible for delivering the service again to approximately 3400 tenants and 215 leaseholders. This creates a unique opportunity for tenants and the council to form a Housing Service that makes your homes and communities a great place to live.

Our vision is to create a truly excellent service - one that is digitally enabled, easy to do business with, and where tenants are at the heart of everything we do.

Our staff delivering this new Housing Service will be at the centre of communities across the district. We have created East and West areas with their own neighbourhood management teams who will be helping tenants and ensuring that properties are in the best possible condition.

The same contractors, Mears, will be dealing with your repairs and maintenance. You can find out later in this newsletter about a new and improved way of keeping in touch with them.

There is an exciting future ahead. We are committed to delivering real improvements in the service you receive and we want you to get involved. We want to hear what you have to say and we shall be seeking out your views in the coming months. Perhaps you would like to be more actively involved - the Tenant and Leaseholder Board is always keen to hear from new members.

We hope you will find the information in the newsletter informative and useful. We plan to issue a newsletter regularly as one of the ways we shall be keeping in touch and listening to your views.

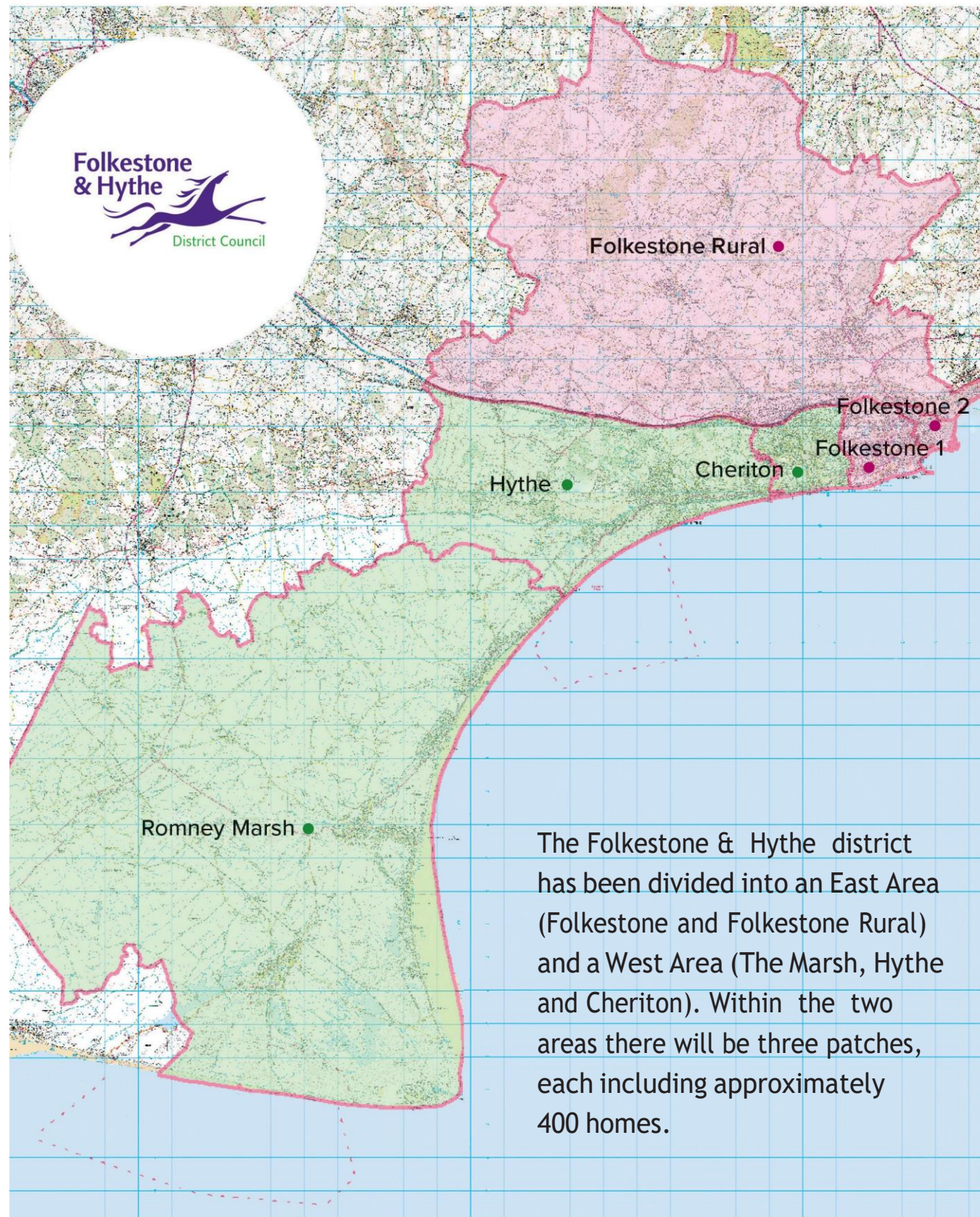
In future we shall be sending the newsletter by email. Please complete the form on page 10 to let us know your current email address or send your details to [communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk). If you do not have an email address please use the form to indicate if you wish to receive a printed copy of the newsletter.

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

## 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](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk).

# New housing areas



The Folkestone & Hythe district has been divided into an East Area (Folkestone and Folkestone Rural) and a West Area (The Marsh, Hythe and Cheriton). Within the two areas there will be three patches, each including approximately 400 homes.

The teams will work to ensure that service requests and complaints are responded to promptly and reports of any issues of safeguarding, harassment or anti-social behaviour are investigated. The area teams will also coordinate the programme of estate inspections.

Leading both the East and West teams will be:  
Neighbourhood Management Senior Specialist -  
**Tom Harding**

## East Area

Neighbourhood Management Specialist  
**Alex Stock**  
Neighbourhood Management Officers -  
**Charlotte Kennett, Hayley Kent and James Hatton-Brown**

## West Area

Neighbourhood Management Specialist -  
**Andre Ford-Hamilton**  
Neighbourhood Management Officers -  
**Samantha Brewerton, Karen Frampton, Nkoli Onyejeli, Debbie Brazier-Helliwell and Kelly Flannery**

Supporting the teams will be other specialist staff including:

**Leasehold Senior Specialist** who will be managing the leasehold properties and the Right to Buy scheme.

**Independent Living Officers** who will help tenants over the age of 55 to continue living as independently as possible while providing them with enhanced housing management.

**Tenant Liaison Specialist** who will be developing new ways that tenants can get involved.

**Caretakers** who ensure that the communal areas in our blocks of flats are clean and well maintained.

**Neighbourhood Surveyors** who will work with contractors to monitor all repairs carried out across the district.

# The team managing your area

The two areas will each have a dedicated management team who will keep in regular contact with tenants, providing support around managing your tenancy, dealing with repairs and helping with neighbourhood issues.

# Repairs and maintenance

You've told us that how we deal with repairs and maintenance is your top priority for us to focus on.



Above, Mears supervisor in the Folkestone and Hythe district, Daniel Fagg, and van with its new F&HDC logo

## Keep on track of your repairs, digitally

In partnership with Mears, Folkestone & Hythe District Council is delighted to launch a new repairs appointment service for tenants and leaseholders. The new system uses technology that will transform the way tenants interact when arranging a repair.

The new appointment system allows a tenant, having already booked a repair appointment, to interact with Mears through the entire process. Tenants will now be able to add an appointment to their calendar as a reminder, track when the engineer is arriving on the day of an appointment and rearrange appointments if necessary.

We understand that life can sometimes get in the way of an appointment and the new system from Mears called MCM Live will make it easier for tenants to update us of these changes.

### How to link to the system

From 1 October 2020 when you book a repair with Mears you will receive a text message to confirm your appointment and this text message will include a link allowing you to access updates on your repair right through to completion.

When the repair is done, you will be able to provide feedback which will help Mears and F&HDC make our service even better.

Regional Director of Mears Group, Karen Beckley, said, "We are delighted to launch our new system MCM Live with Folkestone and Hythe District Council. It is truly bespoke to meet the needs of our customers and will absolutely transform their experience when arranging repairs.

"At Mears we take pride in putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and we are always looking at innovative ways to improve our customers' experience."

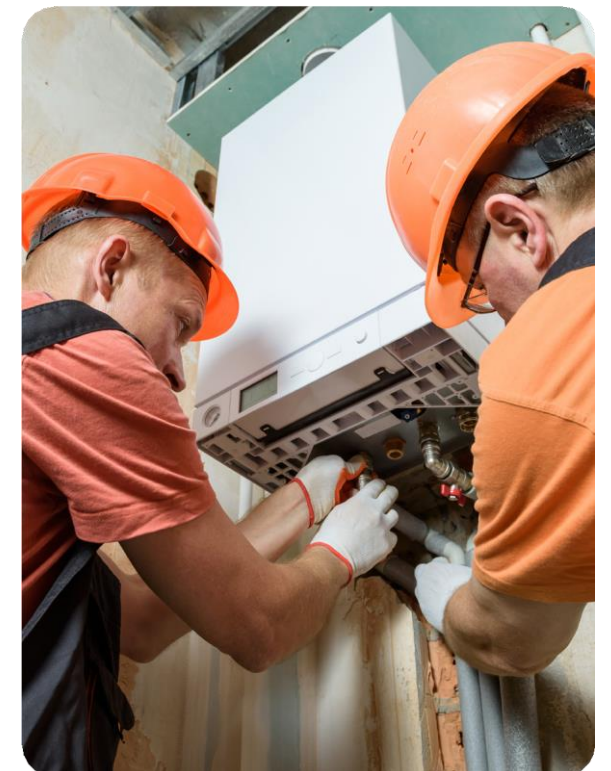
# Reporting repairs

Repairs are needed from time to time and it is worth remembering that those needed for damage caused by neglect or misuse, even accidental, are your responsibility.

If you need to report a repair, use the contact details below. If you reported a repair to East Kent Housing before 30 September 2020, those details have already been passed to the contractor who will ensure the issue is dealt with.

**Household and communal repairs:** telephone the Mears call centre on **0800 313 4740**.

**Gas, hot water and central heating repairs:** email Gas Call Services at [eastkent@gascall.co.uk](mailto:eastkent@gascall.co.uk) or call **0800 012 9958**



# When money is tight



Our rents team is here to support you and will provide a dedicated service for all tenants and leaseholders. The council has ensured that there are a variety of quick and easy ways to pay your rent, service charges (and ground rents if you are a leaseholder), including methods that you are already familiar with, such as direct debit, at a Post Office, at PayPoint, Allpay, or online via the council's website.

If you already pay your rent and other charges through one of the methods above then nothing has changed. You can continue to use the same payment method, payment cards and rent account reference number and the council will receive your rent.

We have a committed Benefits & Money Adviser to help tenants who are struggling with their rent, benefits, debt and/or budgeting. If you feel you

would benefit from this service you can self-refer via our website <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/us/ways-to-contact> or ask your Neighbourhood Officer to arrange for the Benefits & Money Adviser to contact you.

**If you are struggling to pay your rent it is really important that you contact us as soon as possible and explain why you are unable to pay your rent. This will ensure you are provided with the correct advice.**

You may be eligible to claim benefits such as Universal Credit to help towards the cost of your rent. Visit [gov.uk/universal-credit](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit) to find out if you could claim.

You might also be able to claim other benefits such as council tax support. Visit our website at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/resident-information> to see if you could claim housing benefit or council tax support.

## Need independent housing advice or help with other bills?

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

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

# Your voice

Gathering the views of our tenants and leaseholders is important to shaping the service that we are delivering. We want to hear those views and how you think we can improve the service. Our new Tenant Liaison Officer is **Loren Paine** and she is developing different ways tenants can make their voices heard with regard to their housing service.

**The Tenant and Leaseholder Board** has been assisting the council to set up the new Housing Service and if you would like to join the board and have time to attend regular meetings please email us at [communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk). If you do not have an email address please fill in the form on the following page and return it to us.

To ensure we are hearing from all our tenants we have joined up with the **Tenant Participation & Advisory Service (TPAS)**, a not-for-profit organisation which promotes, supports and champions tenant involvement.

TPAS will be working alongside the council to organise a range of events to ensure there are a variety of ways you can get involved that best suits you and your lifestyle, including finding out how you want us to communicate with you. We will update you on the work carried out by TPAS in future newsletters.

As one of our tenants you can access the TPAS website and you can create your own free TPAS account to instantly access resources, advice and information from your mobile device or computer.

## Follow these simple steps to create your TPAS online account:

- 1 Go to [www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)
- 2 Go to the membership tab and down to 'our members'.
- 3 In the search box type the name of your organisation and press search.
- 4 Click on button relevant to you - you can join as a tenant.
- 5 Complete all your details and press join group. Make sure you check the box to receive ebulletins. This will ensure you receive your membership news into your email inbox.
- 6 You will receive an email to activate your account, you can then access the member's area by logging in from the top right hand side of the website.



# Help us to cut down on paper waste



Folkestone & Hythe District Council, along with many other councils, declared a climate emergency in 2019. Among the measures that we are taking to reduce our carbon footprint is to cut down on paper waste.

## Tenant handbook

We shall be producing a handbook to bring together in one place all the information you need. This will be available on the council website but if you do not have online access and would like to receive a printed copy then please indicate in the form below.

## Newsletters

In future we shall be sending this tenant newsletter via email. The money saved by emailing this newsletter will go towards helping us to improve the services we provide. Please help us to stay in touch by sending your full name, address, telephone number, and email address to: [communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk).

We shall produce some printed copies for those who do not have email. If you would like to receive a printed copy please indicate this in the form below.

**Return this form to Tenant Newsletter, Housing Services, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2QY.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## I would like to:

Receive a printed copy of the handbook

Receive a printed copy of the newsletter

Find out more about the the Tenant and Leaseholder Board

Receive newsletters by email

# Housing Service delivery under COVID-19



In order to ensure the safety of our tenants, leaseholders, and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, the council's Civic Centre and satellite offices remain closed. In line with government advice on the management of the coronavirus outbreak, it has become necessary to make changes in the way we deliver our services.

We have outlined some guidance below which applies to when any council staff member or contractor visits you at your property.

When an appointment is booked with Mears, tenants and leaseholders are informed of the safety measures being taken. A text message is also sent containing a link to a video which can be viewed for further information.

## When our officers or contractors attend, please adhere to the following where possible:

- If you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have been in contact with anyone displaying symptoms, please cancel or rearrange your appointment;
- Maintain minimum two metre social distancing from any contractor or staff member visiting your home;
- Wear a mask or mouth and nose covering such as a scarf;
- Clean contact points such as door handles before and after the visit;
- Wedge open doors to any room we need access to;
- Ventilate any room we need access to by opening windows;
- Keep all family members and pets out of affected rooms;
- If requested, please allow our contractors and staff to wash their hands.

**Please advise our contractor or staff member if you prefer them to wear a mask.**

## 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> or, if you don't have access to the internet, you can call us using the contact details on the next page.

# Contact your council

The Civic Centre is currently closed to visitors 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**

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 and Environmental Services

You can also access a Contact Form on our website **<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/us/ways-to-contact>**

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.

## 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.

## Social media:

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

Facebook: **/FolkestoneandHytheDC**

Twitter: **@fstonehythedc**

LinkedIn: **Folkestone and Hythe District Council**

Instagram: **@folkestonehythedc**

