Ashford Borough Council

Autumn 2024 Issue 6



HOUSING MATTERS

Your homes, your news, your views

Hello

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Housing Matters, a newsletter for tenants and leaseholders of Ashford Borough Council, helping to keep you informed about your Housing Service.



If you would prefer a larger text version of this newsletter, please contact Tenant Engagement via email: **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk** or call **01233 330573** to request a copy to be sent.

News at your finger tips

For up-to-date housing news any time please visit our webpage:

www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-news

We regularly add articles to keep you informed about all things housing, from consultations you can take part in that help shape the service, to upcoming projects in your area. You can also sign up there for a version of this newsletter to be sent to your inbox every quarter, helping to save the environment, and save hassle by clicking directly through on featured weblinks.

Competition time!

How many appointments did the housing repairs and maintenance team make in July 2024? The answer can be found in this newsletter. Answers can be emailed along with your name, address and telephone number to **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk**. They can also be posted to Tenant Engagement at Ashford Borough Council, TN23 1PL. One lucky tenant or leaseholder, drawn at random from the correct entries, will win a £25 Love2shop voucher. Closing date for entries is 10th December 2024.

Congratulations to our previous winner, who won our voucher in the Summer edition. Full competition terms and conditions: **www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-matters-comp**

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

A huge thank you to everyone who responded to our Annual Tenants Survey which closed in October. We received a record number of responses:

- 1,191 responses for Low-Cost Rental Accommodation
- Five responses for Low-Cost Homeownership
- 54 responses from Leaseholders

Your valuable feedback will be used to shape our policies and services. The results will be collated, analysed and published on our website, and in our Spring 2025 edition of the newsletter.

Eat Well, Spend Less

Housing officers attend Eat Well, Spend Less events, regularly held across the borough. It is a one-stop shop for housing advice as well as getting a chance to talk to other community services and organisations. There are always food and hygiene banks for any resident to come and collect items that they might need. Come along, we would love to meet you.

The next confirmed event is on **Tuesday, 21 January 2025 at The Willesborough Baptist Church, Hythe Road, TN24 0QR. Times to be confirmed.**

More details of further events can be found on our engagement webpage **www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement**

Estate inspections

Every fortnight the housing team visit areas of the borough to carry out estate inspections. This is an opportunity for anyone in those areas to come out and meet housing officers for a chat, or raise any concerns or issues they may have with their estate or property.

If you would like to attend any of the visits please get in touch with Tenant Engagement so that they can make arrangements with you on 01233 330573 or email **tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk**

2 December - Rothbrook and Spearpoint

16 December - Brookfield B and C - Brookfield Rd, Lewis Court, Flaxpond Road, Forstal Green, Tournay Close, Arlington, Boxley, Clockhouse, Jemmett Rd, Langholme Rd, Kither Rd, Banks Rd, Barn Platt, Bond Rd, Musgrove, Noakes Meadow, Allen Field, Barnett Field, Oak Tree Rd, Little Knoll, Harper Rd, Old Pond Rd

30 December - Newtown

Data collection and data correction

We are making a variety of changes to improve how we function across the housing service. In order to tailor these changes to you, we need to make sure we have accurate data and information about our residents. We will be updating contact and household information and more sensitive data like religion, disability or ethnicity. You may be asked for this information when you contact us to request a service, or you may be asked to complete a form with this information.

Further information will be provided in the next edition of our newsletter.

Don't get caught out!

Last month, a tenant was prosecuted for fly tipping and fined £1,000. Before you allow anyone to remove your waste you must ensure they are registered with the Environment Agency as a 'Carrier of Waste' and that they give you a Waste Transfer Note for the waste they are removing.

For more information about help to dispose of your larger items visit our website at **www.ashford.gov.uk/large-item-collection** or phone **01233 331111**.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund



The project is now in the installation stage with external wall insulation being installed in Nine Acres and soon in Goteley Mere. More than 130 properties have had solar panels installed, we are finalising properties for the Air Source Heat Pumps and Ground Source Heat Pumps. Ground drilling for the ground source heat pumps is due to begin in November. We have received several enquiries from tenants about claiming back money for extra energy generated by the solar panels under the smart export guarantee. Previously we had hoped that tenants would be able to benefit from the smart export guarantee, however due to ownership restrictions tenants are not eligible.

For more information about the Smart Export Guarantee please see the links below:

www.eonnext.com/electricity-and-gas/smart-export-guarantee

www.landlordtoday.co.uk/article/2024/10/understanding-the-smart-export-guarantee-seg/

If you have any questions about the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project or would like more information, contact Sarah Sales by phone on **07771976884** or by email on **shdftenantcontact@ashford.gov.uk**, alternatively, visit our website on **www.ashford.gov.uk/social-housing-decarbonisation-fund**

Register your pets

All cats and dogs living in Ashford Borough Council homes must be

- Neutered
- microchipped
- registered with us

To register your pet please contact your neighbourhood housing officer, you can also read the full pet policy on our website:

www.ashford.gov.uk/pet-policy



Disrepair and compensation, be aware!

We are still receiving a lot of contact from tenants who are unhappy about the amount of phone calls they are receiving from people claiming to be from our disrepairs team, or claiming that they are working on behalf of Ashford Borough Council. If you suspect that you are talking to someone trying to misrepresent themselves as an officer or representative of Ashford Borough Council, please contact our repairs team directly on **01233 330366** to check the contact is genuine. Usually, these calls are made by a claims management company offering no-win, no-fee services. Please be aware that the fees that are accrued while using these services, can end up higher than the money you 'win' leaving you in debt.

If for any reason you are unhappy with any housing or repairs service you have received, our complaints procedure allows tenants to raise concerns and request that we 'make things right'. Tenants can log complaints by telephone **01233 331111**, by emailing **complaints@ashford.gov.uk** or online at **www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints**

If a tenant remains dissatisfied with our complaints process, they have the benefit of the Housing Ombudsman who can impartially investigate complaints. If you are offered compensation from the council or the Housing Ombudsman as a result of a complaint, you will keep the total amount of the money awarded. Find out more about the Housing Ombudsman on their website, at **www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.**



Update on our stock condition survey

66% Ridge have now completed 3,358 surveys, 66% of planned stock condition surveys.

71% Ridge have issued 1,221 energy performance certificates, 71% of their planned total.

The top five risks discovered in surveys so far are:

- 93 concerns of damp and mould growth
- 24 structural concerns
- 20 electrical hazards
- 15 falling between levels
- 12 excess cold hazards

Thank you so much for your cooperation throughout the project so far. The results will be used to determine the planned works programme and any hazards discovered are being addressed along the way.

Kitchen and bathroom replacements

The council has a rolling programme of kitchen and bathroom replacements. This year we have set yourselves an ambitious target to replace, 146 kitchen and 70 bathrooms.

Tenants have been encouraged to be fully involved in the design of their new kitchen and the choices of cabinet & worktop colours and the finishes of other components.

Bathrooms will featuring close coupled toilets and requests for electric showers. Tenants can choose from several colour of tiles or aqua board. We are looking to develop a five-year programme of replacement, which we intend to publish on the web site around early March 2025. The criteria for replacement is based on the age and condition of the existing kitchen and bathroom. This is one of the reasons why it is important we inspect your home under the Stock Condition Survey programme, so we can base programmes of works on accurate information. If you home has been selected for the next programme, 2025/26, you can expect to receive a letter during February 2025. This timeline maybe subject to variation.

Mill View development update

Ashford Borough Council has started work on building four new homes to replace a row of houses that were badly damaged following an explosion at Mill View in Willesborough in 2021. The explosion, caused by a leak from a portable gas heater, injured seven people and damaged four properties.





Contractor Jenner has begun construction of two three-bedroom homes and two two-bedroom homes constructed on the cleared site where 13, 15, 17 and 19 Mill View previously stood. Work on building the four new homes in Mill View is expected to be completed by August 2025.



Anthony, Neighbourhood services Manager



Lisa, Lead Specialist for the Independent Living Team

Visit to Sikh temple

Our Neighbourhood Services Manager, Anthony and Lead Specialist for the Independent Living Team, Lisa attended the East Kent National Health Trust bi-annual symposium in October 2024. The symposium took place at the Sikh temple in Gravesend. We were able to share how we utilise a variety of measures and activities to support the health of our tenants living in our independent living schemes and received some great feedback.

Meet the Team: Tenant Engagement



Lucy Jordan (left) Tenant Engagement Officer - Housing Services
Started in post: October 2024 Main
Aims: To support, coordinate and facilitate the consultation, engagement and involvement processes with all tenants and leaseholders of Ashford BC, ensuring that these voices are heard and have an effective influence on our service provision.

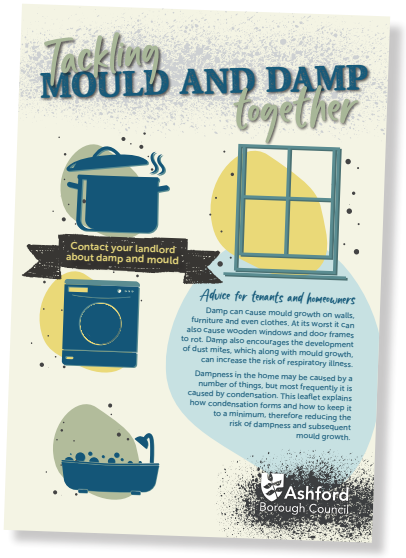
Sarah Sales (right) Tenant Engagement Officer -
Social Housing Decarbonisation Project
Started in post: March 2023 Main
Aims: To act as the voice and point of communication between tenants and Ashford BC, to ensure that all homes within this project are successfully improved in respect of energy efficiency, alongside enabling tenants to manage their spend on energy more effectively.

Find out more about our activities on the website at: **www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement**

Tackling mould and damp together

Damp can cause mould growth on walls, furniture and even clothes. At its worst it can also cause wood to rot. Damp also encourages the development of dust mites, which along with mould growth, can increase the risk of respiratory illness. Dampness in the home may be caused by a rising damp, penetrating dampness, defective plumbing and the most frequent cause, condensation.

We have developed a detailed leaflet which explains how to tackle condensation, damp and mould. It also includes how you can get help from us, and how to complain if you are not happy with our response. You can find the leaflet and more information on our website at **www.ashford.gov.uk/damp-and-mould**

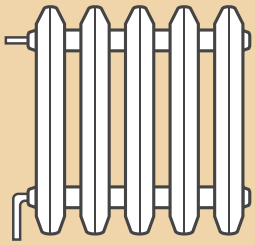


What we can do

Respond to your report of mould and book an appointment to inspect the property urgently, this will usually be within three working days.

If the damp is caused by a repair issue, we will arrange the repairs to be done as soon as possible, this will usually be within 28 working days.

If the damp is caused by condensation, we will repair anything causing the problem such as a broken heating system, or faulty extraction fan.



What you can do

Produce less moisture by covering pans when cooking, and drying clothes outside where possible.

Use an extractor fan or open a window when cooking or using hot water in the bathroom.

Make sure there is a gap between the wall and your wardrobe, and keep the top of wardrobes clear to increase ventilation.

Wipe up any condensation, this is more likely to appear in unheated rooms.

Carefully wash the mould with a soapy cloth.

Please contact us if you have any concerns about damp and mould: damphelp@ashford.gov.uk



Antisocial behaviour is ...

- conduct that has caused or is likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to any person
- conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises, or
- conduct capable of causing housing-related nuisance or annoyance to any person

What IS often considered antisocial behaviour?

- Persistent noise nuisance
- Rowdy behaviour and drunkenness
- Jamming open communal doors
- Uncontrollable pets
- Throwing things from windows or balconies
- Street drinking
- Graffiti
- Dumping rubbish
- Fly tipping
- Damage to property or plants
- Intimidation and harassment
- Malicious communications
- Hate incidents and crime

What IS NOT often considered antisocial behaviour?

- Smells from cooking
- A one off-party
- Children playing
- Dirty looks
- Crying Children
- DIY during reasonable times of the day
- Occasional dog barking
- Overgrown gardens
- Usual household noises (eg doors closing, vacuuming or using the washing machine)



Just because it is not antisocial behaviour, does not mean there is no help available if you see or experience behaviour which concerns you.

If you are worried that someone is suffering abuse or you are yourself, please contact the following:

For child welfare, call 03000 411111, or email social.services@kent.gov.uk

For adult welfare, call 03000 416161, or email social.services@kent.gov.uk

For out of hours and in an emergency you can call 03000 419191

Anonymous concerns can also be made to CrimeStoppers on **0800 555 111** or via their website **www.crimestoppers-uk.org**. If an adult or a child is in immediate danger, always call 999 for the emergency services.

Find more about Community Safety and support and resources on our website at **www.ashford.gov.uk/community-safety**

Don't let antisocial behaviour get out of control

If you are struggling with alarming behaviour from your neighbours or you are struggling to manage your tenancy please contact us for help as soon as possible.

Report antisocial behaviour online at **www.ashford.gov.uk/community-safety** or by phone on **01233 331111**.

Persistent antisocial behaviour will lead to enforcement action. In October 2024, we went to court and were granted a partial closure notice on a property causing alarm and distress to their neighbours. Don't wait until behaviour gets out of control.

How did we do?

Find out what we did across July, August and September across the complaints and housing repairs and maintenance services

July

Our repairs team made 932 appointments, 88% of urgent appointments were attended to within urgent timescales and 57% of routine appointments were attended to within routine timescales.

We received 49 complaints, 53% were responded to within set timescales

August

Our repairs team made 540 appointments, 91% of urgent appointments were attended to within urgent timescales and 60% of routine appointments were attended to within routine timescales.

We received 44 complaints, 82% were responded to within set timescales

September

Our repairs team made 699 appointments, 76% of urgent appointments were attended to within urgent timescales and 59% of routine appointments were attended to within routine timescales.

We received 36 complaints, 64% were responded to within set timescales

New Complaints Policy

Thank you to the 26 tenants who provided feedback on our draft for a new complaints policy for Ashford Borough Council. Cabinet will vote on whether or not to approve the policy in it's current form in November.

Housing Ombudsman Complaints

January - June 2024

January: No complaints

February: 2 complaints ongoing, no decision yet

March: 1 complaint ongoing, no decision yet

April: 1 complaint ongoing, no decision yet

May: 1 complaint, no decision yet

June: 2 complaints ongoing, no decision yet.

Complaints self-assessment

We have recently published our Housing Department Complaint Self Assessment. The assessment goes through each part of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. We have assessed ourselves across nine different sections and 68 code requirements. Our assessment shows that we have met 61 code requirements fully, six partially and three requirements have not been met.



Find our self assessment and complaints procedure on our website:
www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-complaints-procedure

Welfare Intervention Officers

Our Welfare Intervention Officers here at Ashford Borough Council support people who need help with any housing or benefit related issues. They can provide practical advice or signpost or refer you **to another organisation**. They can also help you complete any council forms online if you're unable to do it without assistance.

If you think you need help from the Welfare Intervention Officers, please contact them today. Contact them via email on **welfare@ashford.gov.uk** or visit them in person at one of their drop in sessions:

- **Mondays from 10am until 11:30am** at the One You Shop, Park Mall Shopping Centre, Ashford TN24 8RY – drop in session specifically aimed at refugees.
- **First Wednesday of every month from 1pm until 4pm** at the One You Shop, Park Mall Shopping Centre, Ashford TN24 8RY - everyone is welcome
- **Last Friday of every month from 10am until 12.00pm** at 115 Cudworth Rd, Willesborough, Ashford TN24 0BE - everyone is welcome
- **Second Friday of every month from 10am until 12pm** at The Royal British Legion Office. Address: Church Road, Legion House, Ashford, Kent England, TN23 1RA - everyone is welcome

For more information about the Welfare Intervention team or to complete a self referral form, please visit: **www.ashford.gov.uk/welfare-reform**

Festive Finances

Over one third of our tenants pay their rent and rental arrangements manually. It's important to remember to budget over the holidays.

Speak to your housing officer or welfare officers if you are experiencing any financial struggles, and please remember, you are not alone.

Ashford Advice offer advice and support if you're struggling with debt, their contact details are below:

Phone: **01233 626185**

Email: **ashfordadvice@gmail.com**

Face-to-face between 9:30 - 11am at
Seabrook House, Church Road, TN23 1RD



Useful contacts

Report repairs or damp/mould: www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair or call 01233 330366

Raise a complaint: www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints or call 01233 331111

Your Neighbourhood Housing Officer: www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer or call 01233 330688

Housing help and advice: www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-help

Welfare Intervention Team: www.ashford.gov.uk/welfare-reform or call 01233 331111

Tenant Engagement Team: www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement or call 01233 330573

Scan the QR code to provide feedback about this newsletter

Ashford Borough Council