

January 2025

TENANT NEWS

**All the
information you
wanted to know**

Pages 4 - 11

Tenant
Satisfaction
Action Plan
Special



**Folkestone
& Hythe**



District Council

Happy New Year to you all. I hope you have enjoyed the festive period.

I would like to start by thanking everyone who participated in our Tenant Satisfaction survey. It's important to us that we listen to you and make the changes you feel are needed to improve the service. Following the survey results we have created an action plan based on your feedback, you can find this on page 4.

One thing that tenants highlighted was that they wanted more details about certain aspects of the housing service. So we've made this a special edition of the newsletter full of all the essential information you need as a tenant. We'd recommend keeping it as a handy reference guide.

Although we always aim to provide a high level of service, we also want to know when something isn't right, so on page 7 you can find our complaints procedure where we go into detail about what you can expect at each stage of the process.

It's important to us that we work together with tenants to improve the housing service so last year we launched the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and its members have been hard at work. You can find out more about the work they've been doing regarding anti-social behaviour on page 9.

We want you to be happy and comfortable in your home and part of that includes ensuring they are well maintained. On page 11 we've broken down what our responsibilities are in terms of repairs and upkeep alongside what your responsibilities are as a tenant. We have also included the contact details for our contractors on the back page of the newsletter, so you know who to contact if you have a problem.

Following feedback in the tenant survey we're also sharing more information about what different organisations do on pages 5 and 6, so you know who to go to for the answers or support you need.

Finally, I'm delighted to announce that our garden competition will be returning in 2025 you can find more about that on page 3 alongside some words of encouragement from our tenant judges.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

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.

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facebook.com/groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders

@fstonehythedc

Folkestone and Hythe District Council

@folkestonehythedc

Domestic Abuse

If you, or a friend or relative, is suffering from domestic abuse, it's important to tell someone.

Domestic abuse can include any of the below:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Harassment or threats
- Financial control
- Shouting at you (including in front of children)
- Stalking you
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour

The following local services offer advice and support:

Victim Support: ☎ 0808 168 9276

✉ kent.da@victimsupport.cjsm.net

Home-start Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop:

☎ 01303 244836

✉ hello@homestartshepway.org.uk

Rising Sun Domestic Violence & Abuse Service:

☎ 01227 452852 ✉ referrals@risingsunkent.com

Clarion Domestic Abuse Support Line:

☎ 07376 637069

✉ centrakent@centragroup.org.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline:

☎ 0808 200 0247

The Housing team takes all reports of domestic abuse seriously. We are currently working to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation. We will update you on this in upcoming newsletters.

Garden competition to return

Our tenant and leaseholder garden competition will be returning in 2025. Following a successful showing last year the judges are keen for even more tenants and leaseholders to get involved.

Judge Gillian Jenkins said:

“ It has been fantastic to get out and meet the tenants and see their wonderful efforts, it really is a pleasure to see residents taking pride in where they live. We want to emphasise that no space is too small to submit. If you are proud of your plants and gardens then we want to see them too. ”

The judges are keen to get the next generation of gardeners involved as well and judge Sharon Gasson added:

“ We really want to encourage entries in the children's category, so if you know a young person who is developing a love for gardening, we'd love to hear about it. No effort is too small. ”

Further details about this year's competition will be in our April Bulletin and you can find out more information on our website folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tenant-garden-competition



Your guide to tenant services

Tenant Satisfaction Action Plan

More than 700 of you took the time to respond to our tenant satisfaction survey this summer. Thank you for telling us what you think of the housing service.

Working with the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel, we have looked at the survey results and created an action plan to improve the service we provide.

The action plan focuses on specific areas where some of you felt we need to improve, including:

What you told us	Our response
Some repairs take too long to be dealt with. Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair: 63%	This newsletter includes our target response times for different types of repair on the back page. You can also find out which repairs are the responsibility of tenants and which are the council's responsibility on page 11. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will be undertaking reviews of our repairs services over the coming months.
Communication around improvements to your homes needs to be better. Satisfaction that we keep tenants informed about things that matter to them: 61%	This newsletter includes information on our approach to planned works (e.g. kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors etc). on pages 8 and 9. Our teams are committed to improving communication and this is also an important area for our contractors as well.
Some tenants felt that complaints about repairs and anti-social behaviour aren't always dealt with. Satisfaction with our approach to handling complaints: 27%	Reports of repairs and those of anti-social behaviour are not treated as complaints. This newsletter includes information on what is dealt with as a complaint and what isn't classed as a complaint. Information on how to make a formal complaint is on page 7.
Some feel that we do not learn from the complaints we receive. Satisfaction that we listen to tenant views and act upon them: 54%	We are introducing a system to capture lessons learned from complaints, and we will tell you about how we have used feedback from complaints to improve our services in future tenant bulletins and newsletters.
Communal cleaning in some blocks could be better. Satisfaction that we keep communal areas clean and well maintained: 64%	Our new cleaning contract with Cleanscapes started in October 2024. This newsletter includes details of the cleaning they carry out, and how often, and a link where you can check the cleaning schedule for your area on page 10.
There are problems with roads, potholes, and bin collections in some areas. Satisfaction that we make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods: 53%	These services are not delivered by the Housing team. We recognise that it can be confusing to work out which council or department does what, so this newsletter includes information on who does what on pages 5 and 6.
Anti-social behaviour sometimes takes too long to be dealt with. Satisfaction with our approach to handling anti-social behaviour: 48%	This newsletter includes information on page 8 on our approach to anti-social behaviour, including what is and isn't classed as anti-social behaviour and how to report it. Find out more at folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/asb-domestic-abuse-council-tenants .

Your guide to tenant services

What do the Housing teams do?

There are three areas within Housing:

Housing Assets

This team oversees the condition of our housing properties. This includes:

- ▶ Day-to-day repairs and maintenance
- ▶ Planned and major works, for example kitchen, bathroom, window, door and roofing replacements
- ▶ Compliance (health and safety), including gas, electrical, water, fire, lift and asbestos safety
- ▶ Decarbonising our housing stock – the council aims for all its properties to have an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C or higher by 2030 and for all properties to achieve net zero carbon ready by 2050.

Housing Operations (Neighbourhood Services and Independent Living)

These teams are responsible for tenancy and estate management, which includes:

- ▶ Letting empty homes
- ▶ Visiting new tenants to ensure they are settling in
- ▶ Dealing with general tenancy matters
- ▶ Dealing with mutual exchanges
- ▶ Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- ▶ Providing advice and support to tenants who are struggling to meet the conditions of their tenancy and are at risk of losing their home
- ▶ Ensuring council estates and properties are kept clean, tidy and safe, including inspecting communal areas in blocks of flats and all parts of our estates
- ▶ Completing weekly health and safety inspections of all Independent Living schemes
- ▶ Completing an annual Wellbeing Plan with all Independent Living tenants
- ▶ Tenant engagement, including working with our tenant groups (such as the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel, Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Independent Living Forum), supporting tenants to get more involved in the housing service, organising consultations and running surveys.

Housing Strategy & Homelessness

This team deals with:

- ▶ Housing advice
- ▶ Homelessness and homelessness prevention (including working to tackle rough sleeping)
- ▶ Housing allocations and waiting list applications (including existing council tenants wanting to transfer)
- ▶ Private Sector Housing (i.e. non-council housing)
- ▶ Strategic Housing including new build and acquisitions to the council stock

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

DISTRICT



Housing



Benefits



Council tax



Rubbish and
recycling
collection



Parking



Planning and
licensing applications



Building
Control



Environmental
Health

Kent County Council

COUNTY



Libraries



Education
and schools



Births, deaths
and marriages



Pavements, roads
and repairing potholes



Social Services, also
Occupational Therapy

Your guide to tenant services

Complaints

You can make a formal complaint in the way that best suits you – online, by email, by phone or by letter. We have put this information together to help you understand what is, and what isn't, classed as a complaint.

What is a complaint?

The council's definition of a complaint is:

"An expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response".

This includes where we, or one of our contractors:

- Provide a poor service or fail to meet our service standards
- Fail to follow our own policies and procedures
- Give incorrect or misleading information
- Fail to do something we said we would
- Communicate in a rude or inappropriate manner.

What isn't a complaint?

A complaint is not a request for service, help or information. The following are examples of things which are not treated as complaints:

- Reporting a repair – when you first report a repair, this is dealt with as a request for service
- Reporting anti-social behaviour – where you want to complain about a neighbour or something happening in your community, although you may think of this as a complaint, it is dealt with under our Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and is not treated as a complaint
- General enquiries, comments and initial requests for service or information – these are dealt with as part of the Housing team's normal business
- A legal dispute – these are dealt with by the council's Legal team
- An insurance claim – these are dealt with by the council's Insurance team.

Our complaints process

Stage 1

We have a dedicated Housing & Corporate Complaints Officer who investigates and responds to all Stage 1 complaints. We aim to provide a reply within 10 working days. If we're unable to do this, we will let you know.

Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with our initial response, you can ask for your complaint to be escalated to Stage 2. It will be reviewed by a senior manager within the team your complaint relates to. They will examine your original complaint, look at how it was handled, the procedures followed, and the reply given. They will then write to you with their conclusions.



If you are still not satisfied with the reply, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

You can make a complaint:

 folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback

 complaints@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk  **01303 853300** or by writing to us at the Civic Centre.

Please do not use these methods to report a service request, instead contact

 housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk  **01303 853300**.

We aim to provide an initial response to general service requests within five working days, although depending on the nature of your enquiry, it may take longer for us to provide a full response.

Your guide to tenant services

Anti-social behaviour

We believe that all our tenants and leaseholders should be able to enjoy living in their homes and neighbourhoods without fear of anti-social behaviour (ASB).

ASB comes in many forms, and anyone can be a victim regardless of age, race or gender. ASB can range from low level, persistent nuisance to serious criminal incidents. Some examples of what we class as ASB include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Deliberate and excessive noise, such as music at unreasonable times
- ▶ Misuse of communal areas
- ▶ Verbal abuse
- ▶ Vandalism or damage to other people's property
- ▶ Physical harm or assault

Sometimes your neighbours may do things that you do not like, or that may annoy you – but these are not always considered to be anti-social behaviour. Examples of things we would not class as ASB include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Household maintenance (e.g. DIY repairs or gardening) occurring at reasonable times
- ▶ Noise generated by reasonable living activities, including the use of domestic appliances and walking on laminate flooring
- ▶ Non-excessive dog barking
- ▶ Cooking smells
- ▶ Young people playing at reasonable times
- ▶ Inconsiderate parking

If you need to report ASB, you can do so in confidence by contacting us at housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or on **01303 853300**.

When you complain about ASB, although you might think of this as making a complaint, it is treated as a report of ASB and is dealt with under our Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy; it is not treated as a formal complaint.

Please bear in mind that the housing team is not able to deal with ASB caused by people who are not a council tenant or leaseholder. In these situations, we will offer advice and guidance where we can, but we have no power to take action against the person causing the ASB if they do not live in a council property.

The full F&HDC Housing ASB Policy is available on our website at folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/asb-domestic-abuse-council-tenants.

Your guide to tenant services

Planned works

We are working to make improvements to homes in the Folkestone and Hythe district.

Planned, or capital, works programmes are to meet the cost of replacement and refurbishment rather than repairs. Typically, this includes:

- Kitchen refurbishments
- Bathroom refurbishments
- Replacing boilers and heating systems
- Replacing electrical equipment and rewiring
- Refurbishment of communal areas – lighting, door entry systems and fire prevention works
- Replacing roofs

Your guide to tenant services

Tenant Scrutiny Panel

We launched our Tenant Scrutiny Panel in September 2023. The panel is led by tenants and chooses for itself which areas of the housing service it wants to review. The panel holds us to account by scrutinising and challenging our policies, procedures and services.

This gives tenants the ability to do an independent check of how well we are delivering our housing services, and to challenge existing arrangements by making recommendations for how we can improve.

If you're interested in joining the Tenant Scrutiny Panel or would like to find out more, please contact us at tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or on **01303 853300**.

Your Voice, Our Action: How your feedback helped shape our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

During 2024, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel took a detailed look at our approach to anti-social behaviour (ASB) and made the following recommendations and comments:

You said...	We have...
ASB is different in Independent Living schemes due to communal areas and people living closer to each other.	Included wording in our ASB Policy to explain that we will take extra care when dealing with ASB in Independent Living.
You were concerned that sometimes, the person causing the ASB may be able to work out who has reported it.	Updated our ASB Policy to explain that while we always deal with reports of ASB in confidence, we will make it clear to the person who is reporting it that we cannot guarantee anonymity as the person causing ASB may be able to draw their own conclusions about who has reported it.
We need to make it clear what is, and what isn't, classed as ASB.	Included information on page 8 in this newsletter with examples of the types of things we consider ASB and those which we don't. The new ASB policy also includes this information.
Data protection should be referenced in the ASB Policy.	Added a section to the ASB Policy explaining our approach to data security and sharing.

- Replacing doors and windows
- External work – repointing and rendering
- External decoration to communal areas of flats
- Carbon reduction work – insulation, photovoltaic panels and new heating systems.

The work covers those fixtures which may have reached the end of their practical life or do not meet the government's Decent Homes standard.

If your home is on a programme for replacement or refurbishment works, we will be in contact with you to arrange an initial survey and explain the works required, the contractor undertaking the works and the time it will take to complete the works.

Your guide to tenant services

Communal cleaning

From 1 October 2024, Cleanscapes became our new partner for cleaning the communal areas in our blocks of flats. Each time Cleanscapes attend, they will let you know they've been by completing an attendance sheet which will be displayed on the notice board or near the front door. This includes letting you know when they have been on site to carry out quality inspections.

Below you can see what Cleanscapes do, and how often:

General needs blocks

Every week

- ▶ Clean all entrance areas including glass, fixtures and fittings, external letter boxes and porch areas
- ▶ Vacuum entrance mats
- ▶ Sweep and wash clean stairwells and landings
- ▶ Sweep and wash clean skirtings, doors, door ledges,
- ▶ handrails, wall lights and service boxes
- ▶ Remove cobwebs from ceilings
- ▶ Remove stubborn marks from walls
- ▶ Sweep walkways, basements and patio areas, and remove/dispose of litter/weeds
- ▶ Sweep bin areas

Every three months

- ▶ Clean all communal windows inside and out (where safely accessible)

Every six months

- ▶ Clean carpets and hard floors

Every year

- ▶ Wash communal bins

Independent Living schemes

Every week day

- ▶ Clean all entrance areas including glass, fixtures and fittings, external letter boxes and porch areas
- ▶ Clean lifts, paying attention to mirror, control panel and runners (where applicable)
- ▶ Vacuum where possible (or sweep) hard floors and then damp mop them
- ▶ Vacuum carpeted areas and entrance mats
- ▶ Clean communal bathrooms, toilets and laundry rooms
- ▶ Clean communal lounges and staff offices

- ▶ Sweep and tidy the area immediately outside the main front door

Every week

- ▶ Remove cobwebs from all areas
- ▶ Dust or damp wipe handrails, balustrades, skirtings, window sills, appliances and other horizontal surfaces
- ▶ Spot clean gloss paintwork, walls, switches and sockets to remove impact marks
- ▶ Clean doors and internal glazing

- ▶ Sweep light debris and disinfect bin areas

Every three months

- ▶ Clean all communal windows inside and out (where safely accessible)

Every year

- ▶ Steam clean carpets or deep clean hard floors
- ▶ Wash communal bins

As when required

- ▶ Clean guest rooms

To find out when Cleanscapes are due to carry out any of their tasks for your block, you can scan the QR code below, or visit cleanscapes.co.uk/service-provision, and enter your full postcode.



Your guide to tenant services

Repair responsibilities

Housing service

- ▶ Looking after the structure of your home, including repairing and maintaining the structure
- ▶ Carrying out an annual gas safety check and service of every gas or solid fuel heating system
- ▶ Maintaining the outside of your home, including chimneys, roofs, drains, gutters, outside pipes, outside doors and windows (including their frames) and external decoration
- ▶ Maintaining some areas inside your home, including plaster work (but not minor surface cracks), internal plumbing, power and lighting, carpentry such as floors and stairs (but not kitchen / bathroom units or cupboards)
- ▶ Maintaining the area around your home – this covers the front path or steps leading to your home and any shared areas of the building your home is part of (if applicable)
- ▶ Maintaining communal door entry systems, communal TV / satellite systems, lifts, stairwells, windows and doors (if you live in a flat)

Tenant responsibility

- ▶ Keeping a home clean, tidy and well maintained, inside and out
- ▶ Fixing, at your own cost, any damage caused by members of your household, family, visitors, and pets
- ▶ All decoration within your home, including repairing surface cracks and holes in the walls
- ▶ Replacing fuses and re-setting trip switches
- ▶ Replacing bulbs and tubes in fluorescent lights
- ▶ Periodically testing smoke alarms and replacing batteries annually
- ▶ Clearing blockages to sink, bath, and basin waste pipes
- ▶ Repairing and replacing toilet seats
- ▶ Replacing washers and dripping taps
- ▶ Replacing plugs and chains to sink, bath and basins
- ▶ Ensuring that drains and external gullies (except in shared areas to flats) are kept clear
- ▶ Replacing grids over drains
- ▶ Clearing blocked toilets if you live in a house or bungalow
- ▶ Repairing and replacing internal doors and frames including adjusting doors to close over carpets
- ▶ Repairing or replacing door locks, latches, keys, handles, bolts, and other fittings to internal doors
- ▶ Repairing and adjusting kitchen units, cupboards, drawers, doors, shelves, and worktops
- ▶ Replacing wall tiles on fire hearths and surrounds
- ▶ Keeping air bricks clean
- ▶ Clearing any blockages in outside gullies
- ▶ Maintaining and keeping the garden tidy
- ▶ Repairing or replacing gates and fencing (we will replace a fence that borders a public footpath)
- ▶ Repairing footpaths, yards, or patios that are not the main access to the front or back doors
- ▶ Replacing clothes posts, pulleys, and washing lines
- ▶ Putting your rubbish out regularly and securely, on the day of the bin collection
- ▶ Promptly reporting all repairs the council is responsible for
- ▶ Getting permission from the council to make any alterations to your home before carrying them out

Turn the page for more information about how to report repairs and repair timescales

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

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

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 Housing Online service via MyAccount.

For suggestions, compliments or complaints about the Housing Management Service

 folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback

Reporting repairs

Day-to-day household repairs:

Log onto Housing Online (our MyAccount platform on the council tenant section of the website) or call Mears on freephone **0800 313 4740**

Mears target response times for repairs

- 🕒 **Emergency:** 4 hours, or 24 hours, depending on the issue
- 🕒 **Urgent:** 3 working days
- 🕒 **Routine:** 16 working days

Gas, hot water or central heating repairs:

Call Swale Heating on freephone **0800 987 4034**, or if you have an air source heat pump, call the council on **01303 853300**

Swale Heating target response times for repairs

- 🕒 **Emergency:** 24 hours
- 🕒 **Urgent:** 7 calendar days
- 🕒 **Routine:** 14 calendar days

Please remember that you are responsible for any repairs needed because of damage caused through neglect or misuse, even if the damage was accidental. If we have to deal with these repairs, we will need to charge you.

