

January 2026

# TENANT NEWS

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**Folkestone  
& Hythe**   
District Council

# Welcome to the new edition of Tenant News

Happy New Year to you all.

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. So, we have created an action plan based on your feedback that you can find on page 4.

Tenants are at the heart of what we do so we want you to take up the opportunities to have your say on the things that matter to you. You can find out more about the different way you can get involved as a tenant on pages 8 and 9 and read what the tenants who are already involved have to say.

I am thrilled to announce that our gardening competition will be returning in 2026. If you'd love to join in but aren't sure where to start, check out pages 6 and 7 for our easy gardening guide. It's packed with tips to help you create a beautiful green space. Our tenant judges always enjoy seeing the amazing gardens you create, and we can't wait to see your entries this year.

In August we reached out to you about upcoming changes to your service charges. You can find



out more about the 'de-pooling' process and how it will affect you on pages 10 and 11.

And finally, we know this time of year can be difficult so if you are worried about debt or are experiencing financial difficulties please don't wait to contact us. We have a committed welfare team to help with rent arrears, claiming benefits and budgeting advice. You can contact them via email [housing.income@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.income@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or by calling 01303 853300.

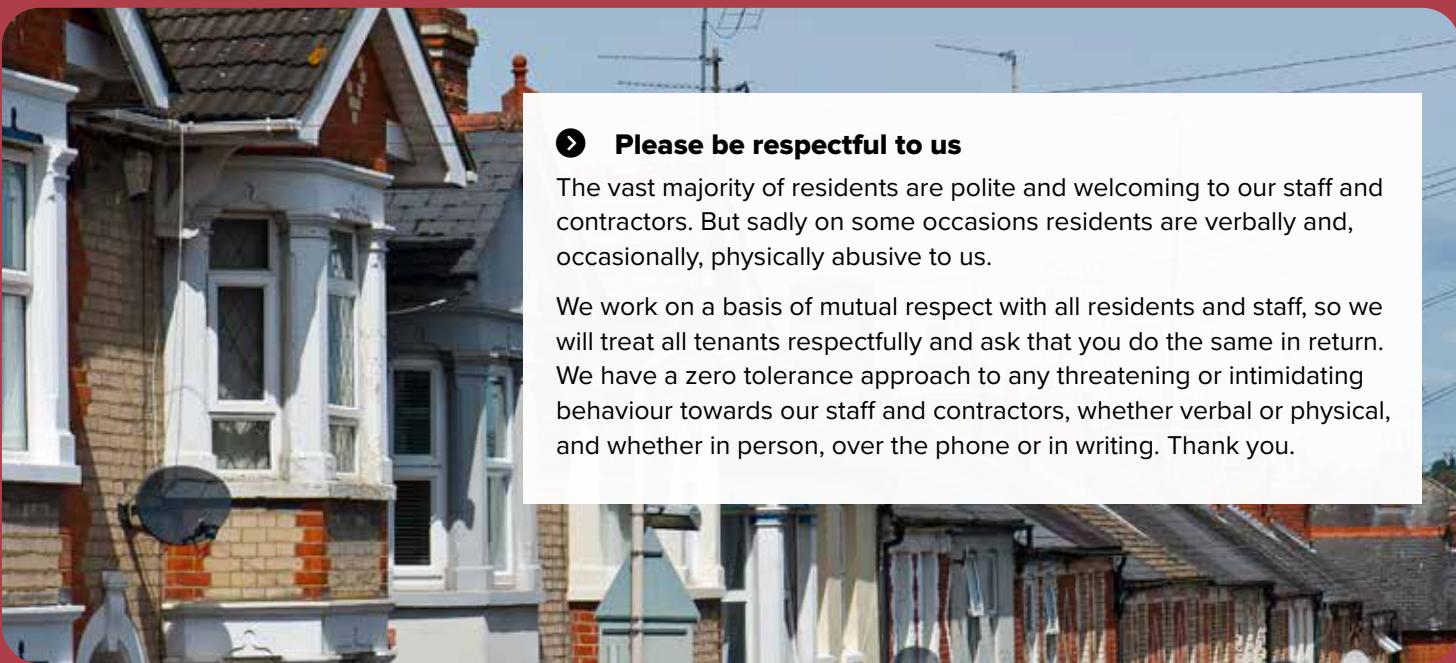
**Councillor Rebecca Shoob**

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.



## Want to stop smoking?

Everyone Health and Kent County Council have teamed up to provide an outreach stop smoking service, and people who take part are three times more likely to quit!

If you are aged over 12 and smoke tobacco products, they will conduct a telephone assessment and signpost you to the most suitable stop smoking service. They can offer:

- Weekly group or one-to-one sessions with a trained, experienced outreach stop smoking practitioner
- Support to help you find motivation to quit
- Help with managing cravings and withdrawal symptoms, including free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products (such as patches, chewing gums and sprays), vapes and prescription medicines.



If this is of interest, get in touch with Everyone Health to find out more:

✉ [eh.kent.outreachstopsmokingservice@nhs.net](mailto:eh.kent.outreachstopsmokingservice@nhs.net)

Text **QUIT** to **60777**

📞 **0333 005 0095**

💻 [kent.everyonehealth.co.uk](http://kent.everyonehealth.co.uk)

## Awaab's Law – keeping you safe

Awaab's Law came into effect for social landlords such as the council on 27 October 2025. Named after Awaab Ishak, who sadly passed away in 2020 due to mould in his home, the law was introduced to stop tenants suffering from preventable health hazards.

The first phase of Awaab's Law covers urgent hazards such as damp, mould and other emergency risks. In 2026, phase 2 of Awaab's Law is expected to also cover hazards such as excess cold or heat, fire risks, electrical safety and structural issues. The final phase is expected to be implemented in 2027 and will cover all other hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) apart from overcrowding.

Awaab's Law legally requires us, and all social landlords, to investigate reported damp and mould within 10 working days, and to report our findings to the tenant within 3 working days after our inspection. If a hazard is confirmed, repairs must be started within 5 working days and completed within 12 weeks, if it isn't possible to take immediate action.

Emergency hazards must be made safe within 24 hours or, if this isn't possible and the property is deemed unsafe, we must offer the tenant alternative accommodation.

If you have any damp or mould in your home, please report it to us immediately. You can do so via your Housing Online account, on our website [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/home-condensation-damp-mould](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/home-condensation-damp-mould) or by phone on **01303 853300**.

## Save time with Housing Online

Managing your home has never been easier thanks to FHDC Housing Online. This convenient platform allows tenants to access essential housing services anytime, anywhere, without waiting on the phone or visiting the office.

To create a Housing Online account, visit [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo)

# Tenant Satisfaction Action Plan

Almost 700 of you took the time to complete our annual tenant satisfaction survey last summer, and we are truly grateful for all of the feedback received. The results were published in the October tenant bulletin, which is also available on our website at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-guides-information/tenant-newsletter-october-2025](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenant-guides-information/tenant-newsletter-october-2025).

Working with the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel, we've developed an action plan to address key areas for improvement. This year's action plan is set out below:

You told us...	We will...
Some repairs take too long to be dealt with. <b>Satisfaction with repairs: 75.8%</b>	Publish target response times for day-to-day repairs and expected life spans of building components covered by planned works (e.g. kitchens, windows etc.)
We need to invest in improving your homes. <b>Satisfaction that the home is well maintained: 75.6%</b>	Continue to develop planned works programmes based on stock condition data. We have also appointed a dedicated Stock Improvement Surveyor to gather this information.
Younger tenants feel they have less involvement with the housing service. <b>Satisfaction that tenant views are listened to and acted upon: 61.8%</b>	Deliver campaigns to try and encourage younger tenants to get involved in the housing service, by offering tenant engagement activities that are more targeted and of interest to them.
Complaints about anti-social behaviour are not always dealt with. Some complaints take too long to be dealt with. <b>Satisfaction with complaint handling: 36.4%</b> <b>Satisfaction with anti-social behaviour case handling: 54%</b>	Publish details of what is and what isn't treated as a complaint (including that anti-social behaviour, and service requests are not logged as formal complaints), our target response times for complaints, and our complaints performance.
Complaints about anti-social behaviour are not always dealt with. <b>Satisfaction with complaint handling: 36.4%</b>	Lobby the Regulator of Social Housing to allow us to include some explanatory text in future surveys to clarify what is meant by "complaint".
We do not always learn from the complaints we receive. <b>Satisfaction with complaint handling: 36.4%</b> <b>Satisfaction that tenant views are listened to and acted upon: 61.8%</b>	Publish details of lessons learned from complaints and how these have been used to improve services. You can read more about this on page 5 of this newsletter.
Grounds maintenance (grass cutting etc) could be better in some areas, and you don't know how often this work is supposed to be done. <b>Satisfaction that communal areas are clean and well maintained: 74.3%</b>	Publish our grounds maintenance standards. We also launched our group of tenant Neighbourhood Champions in December 2025 and we already have more than 20 tenants signed up. You can find out more about this on page 8 of this newsletter.
It is difficult to give an opinion on how we deal with anti-social behaviour as many of you have never experienced it. <b>Satisfaction with anti-social behaviour case handling: 54%</b>	Publish the types of anti-social behaviour we deal with, including case studies and outcomes. We have also appointed a dedicated Neighbourhood Relations Officer, who deals with anti-social behaviour for general needs tenants.

# Complaints

We value your feedback. If something goes wrong, we want to fix it and prevent it happening again. We aim to resolve issues quickly, but if you're unhappy with our approach or service, you can make a complaint:

- Online at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/suggestion-compliment-complaint](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/suggestion-compliment-complaint)
- By emailing [complaints@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)
- By writing to the Housing & Corporate Complaints Officer, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, CT20 2QY

Our Complaints Officer handles Stage 1 complaints. If you're not satisfied, you can escalate to Stage 2 for review by a senior housing manager. If you're still unhappy, you can complain to the Housing Ombudsman.

Complaints don't include service requests like repairs, anti-social behaviour reports, or information queries. These are handled separately as part of the council's day-to-day business.

Read our Complaints Policy online at [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/downloads/download/334/complaints-documents](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/downloads/download/334/complaints-documents).

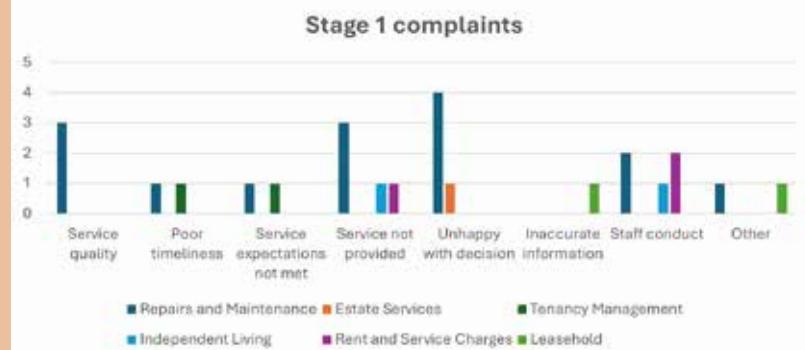
## Types of complaints received

Between April and September 2025, the housing team handled 36 complaints (25 Stage 1 complaints and 11 Stage 2 complaints).

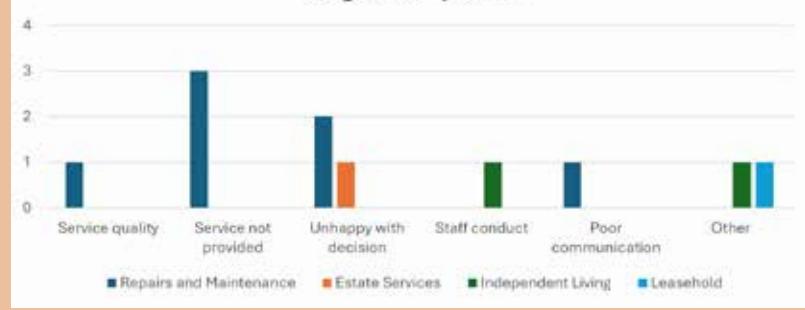
## Learning from complaints

We reviewed complaints upheld between April and September 2025 to understand the causes and improve our services. The findings are shown in the table below.

### Types of complaints received



### Stage 2 complaints



What was the problem?	What have we done?
Tenant was asked to arrange pest control when the issue in question was the council's responsibility	We are ensuring that further information is taken at the first point of contact, to identify whether the treatment of the pest is the tenant's responsibility or the council's
Tenant was charged full rent in error due to an incorrect Direct Debit calculation	We have added an extra level of checks to ensure that any changes to rent amounts align with the scheduled Direct Debit amounts
Unprofessional conduct by a Housing Income Officer	The officer has been spoken to directly, and received guidance and feedback on the appropriate way to conduct calls with tenants
Tenant has records of contact with the council which the council does not hold on file	We have reminded all staff of the importance of recording all interactions with tenants
Delays in repair works caused by incomplete information being passed to Mears	We have spoken to the Neighbourhood Surveyor and to Mears to ensure that preparation works are accounted for in future jobs
Unauthorised payment taken	The system which caused this error has been replaced with a new service charge management system, which means this issue can never happen again

# Get gardening

Our tenant and leaseholder garden competition will be returning in 2026. Following a fantastic showing last year the judges are keen for even more tenants and leaseholders to get involved.

Judge Gillian Jenkins said: 'It shows a sense of pride in your home and it creates a lovely neighbourhood and a sense of community for the tenants who have communal gardens. We have seen some truly stunning outdoor spaces this last few years, no matter how big or small, and it shows the care and effort they have put in to caring for their outdoor space. It is always a pleasure.'



When asked why tenants should enter Judge Sharon Gasson added: "There is so much pride and self-satisfaction in creating and growing your garden. Planting your own veg, for example, is fairly easy and you get to eat the fruits of your labour! Children also love to get involved, having their own little plot to dig and grow flowers in is great fun and good for them."



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](https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tenant-garden-competition)

## Cost-saving gardening tips

### Start with seeds instead of seedlings

Seeds are far cheaper than buying mature plants. Many vegetables and flowers grow easily from seed.

### Repurpose containers

Old buckets, crates, or even yogurt pots can serve as plant pots. Just make sure they have drainage holes.

### Propagate plants

Many plants can be multiplied by cuttings or division. This way, you expand your garden without spending extra.

### DIY mulch

Use grass clippings, shredded leaves, or newspaper as mulch to retain soil moisture and reduce weed growth.

### Grow high-yield crops

Focus on vegetables that produce a lot for their space, like tomatoes, courgettes, and beans.

### Use kitchen scraps for compost

Turn food waste like vegetable peelings, coffee grounds, and eggshells into compost instead of buying fertilizers.

### Collect rainwater

Install a rain barrel or use containers to collect rainwater for irrigation. This reduces water bills and is eco-friendly.

### Choose perennials over annuals

Perennials return year after year, saving you money on replanting.

### Swap plants with neighbours

Plant exchanges are a great way to diversify your garden without spending money.

### Plan your garden layout

Proper spacing and companion planting reduce pests and maximize yield, saving on pesticides and wasted seeds.

# Your year-round gardening guide

Whether you have a small garden, balcony, or shared outdoor space, these simple monthly tasks will help keep your area green and welcoming

## JANUARY

- **Plan ahead:** Think about what you'd like to grow this year—flowers, herbs, or vegetables.
- **Clear debris:** Remove fallen leaves and tidy up paths to prevent slips.
- **Check tools:** Clean and sharpen garden tools.



## FEBRUARY

- **Prepare soil:** Turn over soil in beds and add compost if available.
- **Start indoors:** Sow seeds like tomatoes or peppers indoors on a sunny windowsill.
- **Prune shrubs:** Cut back dead branches to encourage new growth.



## MARCH

- **Weeding:** Begin removing weeds before they spread.
- **Plant early crops:** Potatoes and onions can go in now.
- **Lawn Care:** If you have grass, give it a light rake to remove moss.



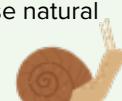
## APRIL

- **Flower power:** Plant hardy annuals like marigolds for summer colour.
- **Feed plants:** Add slow-release fertilizer or compost.
- **Water wisely:** Start regular watering if the weather warms up.



## MAY

- **Hanging baskets:** Perfect time to plant for bright displays.
- **Thin seedlings:** Give growing plants space to thrive.
- **Pest watch:** Look out for slugs and snails—use natural deterrents like crushed eggshells.



## JUNE

- **Harvest herbs:** Mint, chives, and parsley are ready to pick.
- **Deadhead flowers:** Remove faded blooms to keep plants flowering.
- **Mulch beds:** Helps retain moisture during hot spells.



## JULY

- **Water early or late:** Avoid midday watering to prevent evaporation.
- **Harvest veg:** Lettuce, beans, and early potatoes should be ready.
- **Shade plants:** Protect delicate plants from strong sun.



## AUGUST

- **Keep watering:** Especially pots and baskets.
- **Collect seeds:** Save seeds from flowers for next year.
- **Trim hedges:** Keep shared spaces neat and tidy.



## SEPTEMBER

- **Plant bulbs:** Daffodils and tulips for spring colour.
- **Clear spent crops:** Compost old plants where possible.
- **Tidy borders:** Prepare for autumn growth.



## OCTOBER

- **Leaf collection:** Use fallen leaves for compost or bag them for council collection.
- **Protect plants:** Move tender plants indoors or cover with fleece.
- **Clean tools:** Before winter storage.



## NOVEMBER

- **Winter bedding:** Plant pansies or violas for colour.
- **Insulate pots:** Wrap containers to protect roots from frost.
- **Plan next year:** Make notes on what worked well.



## DECEMBER

- **Festive touch:** Use evergreen cuttings for decorations.
- **Minimal watering:** Most plants rest now—avoid overwatering.
- **Check structures:** Ensure fences and sheds are secure before storms.



# Ways to get involved

Tenant involvement has never been more important. Your feedback, ideas, and experiences help us deliver the best possible housing service. If you have a little time and want to make a difference, there's a role for you. The council can arrange transport to and from meetings and we will also reimburse any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred as a result of attending meetings.

We've created a tenant engagement structure so every Folkestone & Hythe District Council tenant and leaseholder can get involved in a way that suits them. Whether you want to influence big decisions, check service standards, or share creative ideas, there's a group for you.

## Our Main Groups – All open for new members

### Strategic Tenants Advisory Panel (STAP)

STAP connects directly with housing managers and the councillor responsible for housing and homelessness. Members help shape policies, review performance, and oversee contractors and purchasing. STAP meets every other month at the Civic Centre (6 meetings per year).

### Scrutiny Panel

This group takes a deep dive into key topics that need extra attention—recent subjects include anti-social behaviour, complaints, tenant communications, and damp and mould. Members have full access to staff and resources to make recommendations that lead to real improvements.

### Estate & Neighbourhood Champions

Champions carry out real-time surveys on works completed by the housing service or contractors. Areas include:

- Grounds maintenance
- Cleaning
- Repairs and compliance

We've worked with tenants and staff to create a simple grading and reporting system for services like grounds maintenance, cleaning, and repairs. This system makes sure contractors meet agreed standards and respond quickly when something isn't right.

There are no regular meetings—just a short monthly report and occasional updates when needed. Training is provided, so you'll know exactly what to look for.

### Tenant Communications Group

This group helps shape newsletters, bulletins, website content, letters, documents and social media aimed at tenants.

### Independent Living Forum

For tenants in Independent Living schemes (around 20% of our homes), this forum brings representatives together to discuss common issues and speak directly to contractors and managers. Each scheme has two representatives.

#### Interested?

Email [tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or visit [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/ways-to-get-involved](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/ways-to-get-involved) to sign up.

# What our tenants say



## Kim Lindsay

Member of STAP, Scrutiny Panel and a Repairs Champion

“ The reason I joined STAP was because I am very grateful to be a council tenant. I wanted to be a part of the changes that move Folkestone and Hythe District Council forward. I benefit in knowing what happens as a tenant. I would encourage other tenants to spare a few hours every other month, to join us in this very worthwhile group. ”



## Medina Hall

Member of STAP, Tenant Communications and Planning Champion

“ I care about the future and the state of housing for our disabled tenants. They need a voice and representation, and I am very outspoken! ”

## Gina Dray

Scrutiny Panel, Repairs & Procurement Projects, and Garden Competition

“ I got involved because I had an input to give and wanted to make sure that services are done correctly. If the council doesn't know that something is wrong, they cannot put it right, so why not get involved? ”



## Gemma Atkins

Member of STAP and New Build and Place Planning projects

“ I got involved with tenant engagement because tenants that have young families need a tenant representative who can be their voice of reason and have their say on matters that affect them. Getting involved is a way of using a platform to be able to express ideas and help the council understand what tenants need and it has benefited me because I am able to help other people who are not sure who to turn to and it helps me understand how things are run at the council. ”



## David Paxman

Member of STAP, Independent Living Forum, Procurement and Compliance Group projects

“ It is important for tenants to get involved in engagement groups, as this helps FHDC make decisions which are balanced and not one sided. Some important changes which have been the result of tenant engagement are: changes to the tenancy agreement and repairs/improvements to housing stock. These changes have benefitted FHDC (they actually saved money) and also helped maintain a good level of tenant satisfaction. ”

# Changes to your service charges

In October 2020 the district's housing service was brought back to be run by the council. Since then the housing team have been working hard to make your homes and estates better places to live.

Part of this work is making sure the costs linked to your tenancy are accurate and easy to understand.

For many years tenants have been paying a “pooled” service charge. This was one combined amount for maintaining communal areas, but there was no breakdown of what you were paying for. To make things clearer, the housing team have undertaken a piece of work to ‘de-pool’ the service charges. Those tenants that pay a service charge for the block or scheme they live in will see exactly what services they pay for and how much each one costs.

## Key Dates

January 2026 – You will receive a letter giving you more details about how this will affect you if you currently pay a service charge.

February 2026 - You will then receive your annual rent variation notice letter this will explain your exact rent and service charge breakdown for the coming year (April 2026 to March 2027).

### I am concerned about the affordability of the charges, what can I do?

If you are concerned about the affordability of the charges then it's very important that you contact us as soon as possible so we can help and support you. If you are worried about this, please contact our income team on **01303 853300** or email us at [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)

# What is the ‘Right to Manage’?

As a council tenant, under the Housing Act 1985 (amended in 2012), you have a Right to Manage. This means you have a right to take over responsibility for managing your housing services from Folkestone & Hythe District Council by grouping together with other tenants to form a Tenant Management Organisation. To do this you would have to follow the Right to Manage process. Information can be found on the government website: [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk).

## What is a tenant management organisation (TMO)?

A TMO is an independent legal group run by tenants. It takes on responsibility for managing housing services for a group of homes. TMOs can be small—managing just a few homes—or large, covering thousands of properties across a geographical area or estate. Single tenants cannot create a TMO and manage their own services.

Most TMOs employ staff such as housing managers, caretakers, and repair workers, while smaller ones may rely on volunteers. Members elect a tenant-led committee to run the organisation, and the TMO signs a legal contract with the council. The council pays the TMO an allowance based on what it would normally spend on those services.

## What services can a TMO manage?

Services vary, but may include:

- Day-to-day repairs
- Allocations and lettings
- Tenancy management
- Cleaning and caretaking
- Rent collection

Any services the TMO doesn't take on will still be provided by the council. Importantly, your tenancy rights stay the same—the council remains your landlord.

## How do you set up a TMO?

You'll need to:

- Work with other tenants to decide which services you want to manage.
- Engage with residents and gain their support.
- Show that your group has the skills and knowledge to run these services.

The law includes safeguards to make sure TMOs only take on management if they have tenant backing and can operate effectively.

## Right to transfer

Tenants also have the right to explore transferring homes from the council to a private registered provider of social housing. This process involves:

- A tenant-led proposal
- Formal consultation and a ballot
- Approval from the Secretary of State

The council must cooperate but can ask to stop the transfer if it would harm local housing services.

## Want to learn more?

You can visit our website [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service), you can also email [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) or call **01303 853300** for more information.



# 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](http://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](http://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 new service Housing Online via MyAccount (see page 3 for more details)

**For suggestions, compliments or complaints about the Housing Management Service**

 [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback](http://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/complaints-compliments-feedback)

## By telephone:

Call us on **01303 853300**.

Lines are open 10am - 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

## By email:

[housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)

## Social media:

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

 [/facebook.com/groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders](https://facebook.com/groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders)

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

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

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

## Need to report a repair

For day-to-day repairs call Mears on **0800 028 7010**.

For gas, hot water and central heating repairs call Sureserve on **0800 987 4034**.

Email [housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk) to book an inspection with your neighbourhood surveyor.

