

February 2022

TENANT NEWS

£8.97 million of
improvements
page 3

Meet the new
tenant panel
pages 4 – 5

Award-winning
council tenant
David Brown
page 7



Welcome to our first Tenant News of 2022. This newsletter is just one of the ways to keep you up to date with all that is being done to develop and improve the housing service provided by Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Amongst those improvements I am delighted that, as part of our ongoing investment in your homes, we have budgeted to spend around £1.45M on carbon reduction improvements over the coming year. By addressing the fabric of the building first, we will make your homes

more comfortable and better insulated, in line with the council's drive to meet new net zero carbon targets by 2050.

Our total capital spend on improvements and upgrades to your homes and neighbourhood will amount to £8.975M this year, with £1M being spent on new kitchens and bathrooms. This is a significant investment and funding this work is reliant on the rental income we receive from our tenants.

Whilst we understand that many householders are already suffering financial challenges this year, and a rent increase is at this time unwelcome, we are making the most of your money to improve our service to you and the homes you live in. (See page 7 for ways we can assist you if you're struggling to pay your rent).

Our Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel is getting to grips with helping us to make sure that tenants are at the heart of everything we do. You can meet the panel members on pages 4 - 5.

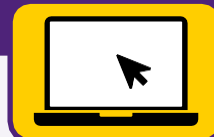
Some of the faces you may already know and I am very pleased that Elaine Bostock is continuing as chairperson and bringing with her the wealth of experience she has from the previous Shepway board. May I record my thanks to Elaine, to our panel members, and to all those who are giving up their time to help us to deliver the very best housing service across the district. Your advice and enthusiasm are invaluable.



With Spring feeling as though it might be just around the corner, I am sure that the gardeners amongst our tenants and leaseholders will be delighted to read the news that the annual gardening competition is returning. I hope this will be welcomed and inspire those currently planning their summer planting.

There are some changes in the council's senior housing team. We say farewell to John Holman who, as Assistant Director, has been at the forefront of the work to return the tenant and leaseholder service to the management of the council. We welcome Gill Butler as Chief Officer, Housing. Gill has joined us from a London borough and brings with her a wealth of management and tenant engagement experience.

Councillor David Godfrey
Cabinet Member for Housing
and Special Projects



What do you think of our newsletter?

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

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

Creating better homes

The income we receive from rents and service charges enables the council to carry out improvements to your homes, including making them more comfortable, and more energy efficient, so easier to heat.

Our new programme of work will begin in April this year and will be rolled out throughout the financial year. The programme of work focuses on health and safety and is planned to include:

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| 126 new kitchens | 143 new bathrooms | 180 new internal doors | 190 windows |
| 238 new boilers | 126 flats will benefit from new door entry systems | 131 flats will benefit from new entrance doors to blocks | 164 properties will benefit from new roofs |

We have allocated funding this year to start working on our climate change pledge to ensure all our properties will have an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C by 2030.

The initial works will be focussed on a 'fabric first' approach which means first maximising the performance of the components and material that make up the building itself e.g. increasing loft insulation before considering the use of mechanical or electrical building services systems.

We are also carrying out some 'green' pilot schemes which include photovoltaics panels to convert sunlight into electricity and air sources heat pumps.

We continue to work hard with our day-to-day repairs partner contractor, Mears, to improve the ongoing service being delivered.

Mears has restructured its operating model and now has dedicated contact centre staff working solely for Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

In addition, the management and contract teams are now based in Folkestone. As a result of these changes, considerable improvements have been made in service delivery especially around overdue repairs.

We're increasing our engagement with tenants by allocating individual areas within the district to our Neighbourhood Surveyors enabling them to build strong relationships within the community.

Our Housing Asset Management Strategy provides information about future maintenance, improvement and development of the council's housing stock. It can be found on the council website [folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/housing-strategy-policies-documents/housing-asset-management-strategy](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/housing-strategy-policies-documents/housing-asset-management-strategy)



Need to report a repair?

Please contact the following to report any repairs:

Mears for day-to-day repairs - 0800 313 4740



Mila for repairs to uPVC doors & windows - 08456 062607



To book an inspection with your Neighbourhood Surveyor – housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Meet your tenant panel

council to deliver an excellent housing service and making sure the tenants' voice is heard. Find out more about our STAP members.

Elaine Bostock – Chairperson



Elaine has constantly strived to improve the quality of life for the tenants and leaseholders of the district. This was key throughout the pandemic, and in the transition from East Kent Housing (EKH) to Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC) as landlord (she helped interview and recruit key officers to the new team). As a wheelchair user, Elaine is passionate about ensuring that the council considers accessibility when planning new builds and regenerations. She was chairperson of the Shepway Tenants and Leaseholder Board for 10 years and held various officer positions before that. Her integrity and drive has built great trust and respect both from tenants and F&HDC officers and councillors.

Carl Plummer



Carl has many years' experience as a tenant representative and held positions on the Shepway Tenant and Leaseholder Board. He is the elected Folkestone and Hythe public governor for the East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust. He is a member of the membership and engagement committee, patient experience committee, and the council of governors. He has been part of the team responsible for changes and improvements across the trust and is looking forward to being able to do the same at F&HDC. Having lived in his council house - his "castle" - for more than 20 years, Carl is passionate about taking the stigma away from social housing and making living in the sector better for all.

Sharon Gasson



A long-standing member of Shepway Tenants and Leaseholder Board (she was secretary and interim treasurer), Sharon has been a tenant for more than 20 years. Her board experience will be invaluable at the new strategic level, where she will be able to scrutinise the performance of F&HDC. After a career in health and social care (as well as animal welfare and administration), she is recently retired and is now able to commit more time to causes close to her heart. As chair of the long-running and popular garden competition, Sharon has got to know many tenants, seeing issues at first hand, but also seeing how communities can come together to form great neighbourhoods.

Gillian Jenkins



Gill, a tenant for more than 20 years, has been a long-term member of the long-established tenant and leaseholder board and has a great understanding of the workings and structure of the council. Before joining the board, she was the chair of the scrutiny panel for East Kent Housing. This work then fed into the residents' panel which covered the four districts. She also trained tenants interested in scrutiny (including how to break the stigma that scrutiny is a negative thing and that it is actually a tool for improvement and introspection). With her experience in this training, Gill will also be able to offer reassurance to officers whose areas may be chosen for scrutiny.

David Paxman



David has been a tenant representative for his local area for some time, as well as district-wide on the Independent Living forum. Before this, he was a member of the residents' panel which undertook the role of the main strategic scrutiny board for East Kent Housing. David has a wealth of knowledge in health and safety, construction and compliance, and comes from a gas and solar background. His key interests are renewables, new builds and environmental impact, as well as the general desire to improve conditions and services for tenants. He has already taken part in a number of strategic-level activities, such as performance reviews and procurement consultations.

Omar Walker



Omar was previously the Student Union president at East Kent College (EKC) Group (also head of the student union, student governor and Students Voice). Leading five different campuses and reporting to the EKC Group's chief executive officer and chair governor, he managed the financial budgeting for the group as well as leading on strategy events. With a background in large-scale project management and international business studies, Omar has been a council tenant in London and Folkestone and Hythe for more than 20 years. He hopes to be the conduit for tenants to gain better understanding of how the housing service is run, as well as influencing change for the betterment of all tenants and for the council.

Medina Hall



Medina gained experience on scrutiny panels and strategic-level task and finish groups while she was a tenant (and was an active member of several communities) with West Kent Housing before moving to the district. She is a trustee of the Sevenoaks CPR Charity which offers training in the use of emergency first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for the public. Medina is registered blind and strongly advocates for disabled people, ensuring adequate considerations are made for tenants' accessibility and equality. Medina works as a teaching assistant, applying the same principles for continuous improvement to her job as she will her role on the panel.

Have your say

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) is seeking views on its proposals for new Tenant Satisfaction Measures. These are part of implementing changes to consumer regulation as set out in the government's Social Housing White Paper - The Charter for Social Housing Residents.

The proposed measures would provide data about social housing landlords' performance and the quality of their services to help tenants hold their landlord to account and help RSH in its future consumer regulation role.

Visit <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/tenants-leaseholders-satisfaction-survey> for more information.

MAKE YOUR GARDEN GREAT

We've got great news - our gardening competition is back this year!

Dig out your shears and dust off your gloves because it's time to get growing. If you're interested in helping organise the garden competition, or being on the judging panel, we would love to hear from you. Just email tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or phone **01303 853723**.



©Terri Julians

BLOCKS TO LOOK THEIR BEST

Do you live in a flat or on an estate? Do you want to help us improve the cleaning and gardening services for our blocks and estates?

Why not join our team of estate services tenant representatives?

We are putting together a panel of residents to help us work on plans to make sure our blocks and estates are looking their best.

If you are interested, or to find out more, email us at tenant.involvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or phone **01303 853723**.



WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

Nothing is more important to us than your safety. Regular Fire Safety Assessments are carried out for all of our blocks of flats and properties with shared communal areas. The advice from our Fire Risk Assessors is that we should not allow any items to be kept in shared areas like hallways, lobbies or staircases.

To make sure everyone can always get out of the building if they need to, shared areas should be kept clear at all times. This includes not leaving bikes, buggies and mobility scooters in these areas.

We want you to be able to enjoy your home, but also think about the people who live around you. We don't need you to make big changes but we do need everyone to do their bit to keep all of our buildings safer.

Tenants raise hundreds for homeless

Tenants at Green Court, the Independent Living scheme in Folkestone, have been helping the homeless. Barbara Ford organised a Christmas fair to raise money for the Rainbow Centre Winter Shelter.

The idea came from Barbara's desire to create an event that the community could look forward to after the difficulties of the past two years. The event was well attended both by residents and members of the community and raised £800 for charity.

Rainbow Centre Chief Executive, Mary Stredwick, attended the event to personally thank Barbara and her helpers. Such was the success of the event that another fair is being planned for next year!

Caring award for council tenant

A career change in his late fifties is reaping rewards for a Folkestone support worker - and his clients.

David Brown, who hails from Birmingham, worked in advertising, including a spell abroad as a creative director.

But, after moving to Folkestone to be near family five years ago and a realisation that he was no longer gaining job satisfaction, he decided to try something new. And, with no experience in the field, David successfully applied for a support worker job at a special needs care home with CareTech Community Services.

He said: "It was a complete change of direction for me, so I didn't know how it would work out, but I can honestly say that it's the most satisfying and rewarding occupation I've ever had and thankfully I've never looked back."

In fact, David's work at May Morning, which has eight service users with learning disabilities and autism, has now earned him the title of CareTech Support Worker of the Year 2021 (regional winner - south).

Explaining his work, David said: "It's a fully person-centred approach - we support people to live happy, healthy and safe lives within their own communities. We do this by enabling each person to live the life they want to in fulfilling their individual aspirations, ambitions and personal goals."

On a day-to-day basis, this means something as simple as helping service users to get showered and dressed in the morning or accompanying them on trips to the shops, cinema, bowling, castles and museums, and - pandemic allowing - holidays abroad.



There are a range of in-house activities and it is here that David, using his artistic talents, has come into his own.

David was nominated for the award by his manager for his contributions to making visual displays accessible to everyone. This includes preparing pictures for an information board for service users who cannot read, and for a recipe folder which enables some users to contribute to meal planning. He also produces a quarterly May Morning Messenger for the users, their families and staff. David's manager said everything is always done to the highest standard and often in his own time.

Of his award, he said: "I felt humbled, gratified and proud to be part of the care community, who are doing such wonderful and worthwhile work for the wider community, despite all of the immense challenges presented by COVID-19."

Have you got a good story to share with other tenants? Please contact us tenantinvolvement@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Struggling to pay your rent?

The council's Income Team successfully helped more than 30 struggling tenants secure payments to reduce their rent arrears due to COVID-19.

The team had access to a grant funded by the government to help those tenants affected by the pandemic sustain their tenancies and remain on track with payments towards their rent account. The funding is still available, and if you have been affected by COVID, contact the Income Team who will be available to discuss and check your eligibility.

If you are worried about debt or experiencing financial difficulties, contact the council to discuss finding the best solution for you. We have a committed Welfare Team to help with rent arrears, claiming benefits and

budgeting advice. If you have other debts and are struggling to pay your bills, we can signpost you to one of the organisations listed below.

- Money Advice Service
- Citizens Advice
- National Debt Line
- Step Change
- Christians Against Poverty
- Warm Home Discount Scheme

To discuss any of the above in more detail, contact us on **01303 853300** or email the team on housing.income@folkestone-hythe.org.uk



Contact your housing team

Online:

You can get in touch with us 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the council website folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

In addition to calling and emailing the council, you can use our LiveChat service via our website. LiveChat currently offers assistance on the following council services:

Council tax & council tax reduction

Housing benefit

Planning

Parking

Recycling, waste and Environmental Services

By telephone:

Call us on 01303 853300. Lines are open 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

By post:

If you would prefer to write to us, please use the address below:

Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2QY

MyAccount - the easiest and quickest way to contact us:

Viewing the council information you need, when you need it, has been made even easier with the launch of MyAccount.

You can find out things relevant to you all in one place – including details about waste collections, council tax, benefits, and more – by using the quick and easy online system. For further details and to find out more about how to register, visit folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccount-information.

Social media:

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

f /FolkestoneandHytheDC

t @fstonehythedc

in Folkestone and Hythe District Council

l @folkestonehythedc

Or join the Facebook group for tenants and leaseholders:

f /groups/fhdctenantsandleaseholders

