

The Link



NEWS FOR DARTFORD TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS

Winter Edition 2023

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Mote's Notes



As we draw a close to 2023, we hope you have enjoyed our festive events of Christmas Lights, Santa's House and Santa's Tour. The Housing Service has been undergoing big changes and is continuing its efforts to involve its tenants and leaseholders in improving services and learning from feedback from customers. This year has been another challenging one, with increasing bills affecting us all. We hope anyone struggling can find support within these pages, with many sources of help listed for residents in need. Please don't suffer in silence, and get in touch if you find you need help. Supporting our friends, family and neighbours is

something we pride ourselves on in Dartford. I would hate to think of someone in our community struggling or feeling isolated and alone, so please do reach out.

If you've a query, concern or complaint, we're here to help.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year.

Cllr David Mote

How to use a QR Code in the Link Newsletter

Android phone

Scan the QR code on your compatible Android phone or tablet, open the built-in camera app. Point the camera at the QR code. Tap the banner that appears on your Android phone or tablet. Follow the instructions on the screen to finish signing in.

iPhone

Under Settings > Camera you can turn on the option to Scan QR codes. When that is enabled you can point your camera at a QR code and you get the option to read it. You can't just take a picture of the code and have the phone decipher it.



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EVENTS

Santa House
25th November
- 10th December

Santa on Tour
3rd December
10th December
17th December
20th December
21st December

Carol concert
13th December

Buccaneer Bay
Now Open

Gallery Exhibitions
January - December

Markets
Dartford Market
High Street
Thursday
and Saturday
9am to 5pm

*Events may be
subject to change*

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Images
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Meet Forum Member - Kathy King

My name is Kathy King and I am the newly elected Chair of the Forum. I would like to thank Trish Chapman for her many years' hard work and dedication in her role as Chair.

I am looking forward to the challenge, especially with all the new regulations coming in from April 2024. I joined the Forum to help our community have a better service.

A bit about me - I am a tenant on Temple Hill. I have lived here for over 40 years and have been a member of the Forum for 12 years. I am a volunteer at St. Edmunds Church and like to get involved in community projects such as improving the garden area on Temple Hill Square, which I am very proud of!

Please join us at our public meetings, or become part of our group and help us make sure our voices are being heard.

It is a very exciting time for anyone wanting to have more of a say in the housing services and the way we are engaged with them. There is a great deal in the way of training, networking and interesting projects to be part of – and it feels great to know you've made a difference.

Whether it's helping an individual tenant, family or working on a larger community project, it offers a great sense of satisfaction and pride when things come together.

Kathy



DARTFORD TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM

The Forum are a volunteer group of Dartford Borough Council tenants and leaseholders, set up to help monitor and improve the housing services delivered by the Council.

If you'd like to find out more about the Forum, please contact rio@dartford.gov.uk, or come along to one of their open meetings info below. There are currently a number of spaces on the Committee so if you are looking for a new role within your community get in touch.

Dartford Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum

Public Meeting Dates 2024

Monday 12th February 2024, Swanscombe Town Council Offices

Tuesday 4th June 2024, Tree Community Centre, Cedar Road

Tuesday 15 October 2024, Temple Hill Community Centre, Temple Hill Square

Doors open at 7pm for light refreshments. The meeting will begin at 7.30pm.



The Forum would like to remind tenants that all contractors must show their ID cards when visiting your property. If you aren't expecting a contractor or have any concerns please call the Council on **01322 343800** for advice.



How are we doing?

A selection of our performance figures are presented below. Look out for further figures in the next edition when we will be publishing results from our new and improved range of customer satisfaction surveys.

| Performance Measure | October 2023/2024 |
|---|-------------------|
| Rent collected by the local authority as a proportion of rents owed | 95.66% |
| Average time taken to re-let local authority housing (days) | 34.31 |
| Percentage of emergency repairs completed on time | 88.85% |
| Affordable housing completions | 33 |
| Long term empty properties brought into use | 32 |



CASH FOR COMMUNITIES

Community grants! £250 up for grabs for local community groups.

Local community groups can apply for up to £250 Community Grant, to help make a difference in their area. The aim of the grant is to help established community groups continue activities that encourage residents to get involved with local initiatives. Funding can be towards training, purchasing equipment or organising trips and events to help bring families and communities together.

Cash for community improvements

Cash for community initiatives to help improve areas around Council housing land is up for grabs. Dartford's tenants and leaseholders are being asked to put forward suggestions for how this money might be spent – that means you!

The Community Initiative fund can be used for funding improvements such as raised flowerbeds, communal area improvements including bin stores and supported housing communal gardens. Applications for funding needs to be supported by the local community, the resident involvement team can help getting your ideas off the ground.

If you want to find out more about any of the grants available above please contact the Resident Involvement Officer by email at rio@dartford.gov.uk or call 01322 343682.





DOWNSIZE FOR CASH - MOVING TO A SMALLER PROPERTY

Is your home too big for you? Would it be better suited to a larger family? If the answer is yes, we can help you move and pay you for the bedrooms you are giving up.

Downsizing can assist tenants affected by reductions in housing benefit or universal credit.

The 'Downsize for Cash' scheme offers a financial reward to secure or flexible Dartford Borough Council tenants who are under-occupying their homes, and helps them to move to a smaller property. This then frees up larger properties for families in need.

If you are eligible to take part in the scheme, you will receive £500 for each bedroom released, plus £100 to help with moving costs. If you live in a parlour style property, you may also qualify for an additional £500. We can also pay for your removals up to the value of £400, subject to the supply of three comparable quotations.

Eligible households will need to be under-occupying by one or more bedrooms and be willing to move to a smaller social housing property (for instance from a three bedroom property to a two or one bedroom property).

For more information please call the Allocations Team on 01322 343907 or email allocations@dartford.gov.uk.

Full details of the Policy are available at www.dartford.gov.uk/housing



REMINDER REPAIR SATISFACTION TEXTS

Please remember to let us know if you're satisfied with your recent repair from our contractor Breyer. When you get your text message, just enter a simple 0 for satisfied and 1 for unsatisfied. This will let us know whether we need to follow this up for you.



XL Bully Dogs

The Government has added XL Bully dogs to the list of dogs banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. For the most up to date guidance please visit https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-for-the-ban-on-xl-bully-dogs#keeping_an_XL

From 31 December 2023 it will be against the law to:

- sell an XL Bully dog
- abandon an XL Bully dog or let it stray
- give away an XL Bully dog
- breed from an XL Bully dog
- have an XL Bully in public without a lead and muzzle

From 1 February 2024 it will be a criminal offence to own an XL Bully dog in England and Wales unless your dog has a Certificate of Exemption.

To get a Certificate of Exemption:

You must:

- Apply by 31 January 2024
- Get third party public liability insurance cover for your dog.
- Neuter your dog permanently if it is not already neutered.
- If less than 1 year old on 31 January 2024, it must be neutered by 31 December 2024
- If older than 1 year old on 31 January 2024, it must be neutered by 30 June 2024
- A vet must confirm if your dog is already neutered.
- Pay the £92.40 fee for each dog you want to keep. The fee is not refundable.

Once you have a Certificate of Exemption and you keep your XL Bully dog it must be:

- microchipped
- kept on a lead and muzzled at all times when in public
- kept in a secure place so it cannot escape
- neutered

As the owner, you must also:

- be over 16 years old
- take out third party public liability insurance against your dog injuring other people
- be able to show the Certificate of Exemption when asked by a police officer or a council dog warden, either at the time or within 5 days

RESPONSIBILITIES AS A COUNCIL TENANT OR LEASEHOLDER

As a Council tenant or leaseholder, you are required to gain permission to keep a pet within your property, and our Policy on Keeping Pets and other Animals in Council Properties has recently been updated to take account of the new legislation for XL Bully dogs.

Specifically Section 5:

5.1.3. Permission will be refused for any dog that is listed in, or fits the description of any dog in, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, unless the dog is exempted under the Index of Exempt Dogs and a Certificate of Exemption can be shown.

Tenants and leaseholders owning an XL Bully dog will need to produce a Certificate of Exemption as part of their application to keep their pet. Tenants already owning an XL Bully dog will need to send a copy to hem@dartford.gov.uk to continue any current permissions given.





Update on Housing's new and revised Policies & Strategies

The Council has prepared and consulted on a number of new Policies over the last year.

These include:

- A Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy which sets out how we will address and respond to reports of damp, mould and condensation in Council properties.
- A Policy on Consultation with Residents on Housing Policy/Strategy which sets out our approach to consultation with our tenants and leaseholders when a new housing Policy or Strategy is being proposed.
- A Policy on Keeping Pets and other Animals in Council Properties which sets out our approach to keeping pets in Council tenants and leasehold properties.
- We also consult when an existing Policy or Strategy has been reviewed with significant changes or updates, or if the review has an impact on the services you receive from us as a result of the proposed changes.

These include:

- The Housing Allocations Policy which sets out the criteria and procedures that we use to prioritise applicants for both Council housing and a proportion of homes owned by our housing association partners in the borough.
- The Housing Assignment Policy which outlines our approach towards statutory and non-statutory assignments, in order that a fair and transparent service is provided to Dartford residents.
- The Tenancy Fraud for Council Housing Policy which sets out how we will prevent and tackle tenancy fraud within our housing stock.
- The Decant Policy which sets out the decant process and practical help and support we will provide to any residents that might be affected.
- The Housing Management Transfer Policy which sets out our approach to housing management transfers for Council tenants.

All of the Council's Housing Policies and Strategies can be found at: <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing-policy/housing-strategy-policy-documents>

Consultations

When a new Policy or Strategy has been developed, or an existing Policy or Strategy has been reviewed with significant changes, we will always consult with you to invite you to have your say on any proposals that may be important to you.

Consultations are usually open between 4-6 weeks. Details of our current consultations and how to respond will be available on the Housing Strategy and Policy page on our website at the above address.

Comments will also be invited on accompanying Customer Access Reviews, which is an assessment which ensures equality and diversity is taken into account in the development of the Policy or Strategy.

If you are being invited to comment on a Policy or Strategy, we may send you a text or email to let you know. Emails will usually be sent from our Resident Involvement Officer from the rio@dartford.gov.uk email address.

Do remember to add this email address to your Safe Senders list to avoid emails from us ending up in your spam or junk folder.

Cost of Living and Food Emergencies

With the current cost of living crisis, we realise you may be struggling to pay your bills. The following guide details how the Council may be able to help you and also signposts to other support channels.

Housing costs

If you are a Council tenant, a tenant in the private sector or you have a mortgage, it's important that you talk to your landlord or lender at the earliest opportunity if you think you will have difficulty paying your rent or mortgage. You may be entitled to the following to help you with your housing costs:

Discretionary Housing Payments

Discretionary Housing Payments apply to both Council and private sector tenants. These can provide extra money to help with your housing costs on top of any benefit support you may already be receiving. To get a Discretionary Housing Payment, you will need to either already be receiving the old scheme Housing Benefit or the housing contribution element through Universal Credit. To access a Discretionary Housing Payment, please visit <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/benefits/apply-discretionary-payments> for further details.



Council Tax Reduction

Council Tax Reduction may be available if your household is on a low income. You could receive support towards some or all of your Council Tax bill. To find out more, please visit <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/benefits/council-tax-reduction> for further details.



£150 Cost of Living payment for Disabled People

The government has confirmed that around six million disabled people in the UK will receive a one-off £150 disability cost-of-living payment from 20 September. Those being paid a qualifying disability benefit will be paid automatically with the vast majority of those eligible expected to receive their one-off payment within a couple of weeks and by the beginning of October. For those disabled people on low-incomes, this payment comes in addition to other cost-of-living payments totalling £650; £400 for all households to help with energy bills, and an extra £150 for properties in Council Tax bands A-D in England.

Household Bills Help with your utility bills

Most utility companies offer help if you are struggling with your bills, including payment plans. Most water companies also offer discounts for households on low incomes. Please speak to your provider to find out more.

Broadband and phone

It may be worth looking to see if switching suppliers could save money. The utility comparison sites can show potential savings.

Food banks

The food banks operating in Dartford are:

Dartford Foodbank Tuesday's 10am – 12 noon

Methodist Church, Adjacent 43 Spital Street, Dartford, Kent, DA1 2DR

Contact: Sue Swaffer

Email: dartfordfoodbank@gmail.com

Facebook: Dartford Foodbank



Hive Hope

Open Wednesday 11am to 1pm

St. Botolphs Church Hall, Northfleet, DA11 9EU

Email: hivehopeuk@gmail.com

Mary's Child

Office hours are 9am-2pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

All enquiries are dealt with at the first opportunity.

Greenhithe, Stone, Swanscombe, Temple Hill

Tel: 01322 382031

Mary's Child

Temple Hill Open Thursday mornings between 10am and 12noon

The Living Well Centre, St Edmunds Church, St Edmunds Road,

Temple Hill DA1 5ND.

Tel: 01322 311201

NLCC Foodbank

Open on Saturday mornings 10am to 12pm.

Temple Hill Baptist Church, St Edmunds Road, Dartford, DA1 5ND

Tel: 01322 281262

The Food Cellar

Christ Apostolic Church, 47-49 High Street, Swanscombe, DA10 0DA

Opening hours: Alternative Thursdays 10am-12pm

Tel: 01322 387096

Free School Meals

If your child is in Year 2 or below, they can get free school meals.

Please speak to your school for more details.

If your child is below 19 years of age and in full-time education,

they may be eligible for free school meals.

Please refer to www.kent.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

for more details.



Help with your income

If you're on a low income, you may be entitled to Universal Credit,

Tax Credits and other benefits. Please follow these links to check

you are claiming any monies that you may be entitled to:

<https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>



<https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk/>



Citizens Advice North & West Kent also provide a help to claim service:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/north-west-kent/>

or telephone number 0808 278 7810



If you have difficulty with the benefit calculators and would like

to talk to one of our officers to help with this, please contact

triage@dartford.gov.uk

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice offer free, confidential, impartial and independent

advice on matters such as benefits, housing, family issues

and employment problems.

Please visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/north-west-kent



MOVE IT OR LOSE IT!



Items stored in communal areas pose a serious hazard in the event of fire. Items can block escape routes, block access for emergency services and even be subject to arson.

Examples of these items include:

- Prams & pushchairs
- Bikes & scooters
- Doormats
- Shoes
- Washing on airers
- Gates across balconies
- Plants & pots
- Many other items.....

All items found in these areas will be removed immediately, without further notice and disposed of.

**Help us to keep you, your neighbours
and your visitors safe.**

Thank you for your cooperation.

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



LOU'S FAQs!

Frequently asked questions put to our resident liaison officer. Our Resident Involvement Officer works with tenants and leaseholders to monitor and improve your housing service. Lou works with the Dartford Tenants' & Leaseholders' Forum, produces this newsletter, offers grants to local communities and organisations, delivers training events and activities to get residents involved in helping shape a great housing service and more! If you've a burning question get in touch using the details below!

Flexible Tenancies are ending – what do I do?

The Council are no longer offering flexible tenancies. If you currently have a flexible tenant and have a clear rent account, call the rents team on 01322 343134 and they will arrange for you to sign a new secure tenancy.

How long do I have to wait for a response?

The Housing Team would like to remind residents that when calling there are maximum timescales for responding to queries and enquires. To ensure the team are able to fully investigate and prioritise the most pressing cases, please note the following:

- Messages left via voicemail or with a member of the team will be responded to **within three working days**.
- Email enquires will be responded to within **ten working days**.

We appreciate your patience and understanding in helping the team to deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

When do we get the results of the TSM Survey?

We would firstly like to thank everyone who responded to our TSM Survey, we appreciate residents taking the time to share their views with us. Results for the survey are being analysed with results being published in the New Year. Look out for more information in the next Link or on our website at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/management/tenant-satisfaction-measures>.

Where can I find out information on how you are performing?

You can find performance information on our website at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing-policy/housing-performance>. In addition to this, each year we reflect on our performance, where improvements can be made and publish our findings within our Annual Report to Tenants. This is an in-depth look at each of our services and includes complaints information. This year's report can be found on our website at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/council-housing/annual-report-local-standards>.



Proud to be supporting





COMPLAINTS ABOUT OUR SERVICE

If we get things wrong, we want to make them right and learn from our mistakes.

How to complain

If you're not satisfied with the service you've received from us, we encourage you to tell us what happened so we can try to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

If you'd like to use our formal complaints procedure, please contact us or visit www.dartford.gov.uk/complaints for information on how to make a complaint.



If you need advice

The Housing Ombudsman provides advice on making a complaint to a social housing landlord. They can also investigate a complaint once it's exhausted our complaints process. Their service is free, independent and impartial - www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.



You can also look at the government's Make Things Right campaign which raises awareness and understanding of the complaints process for social housing residents - www.socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk.



Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman has a Complaint Handling Code. This sets out good practice for social housing landlords to help them respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

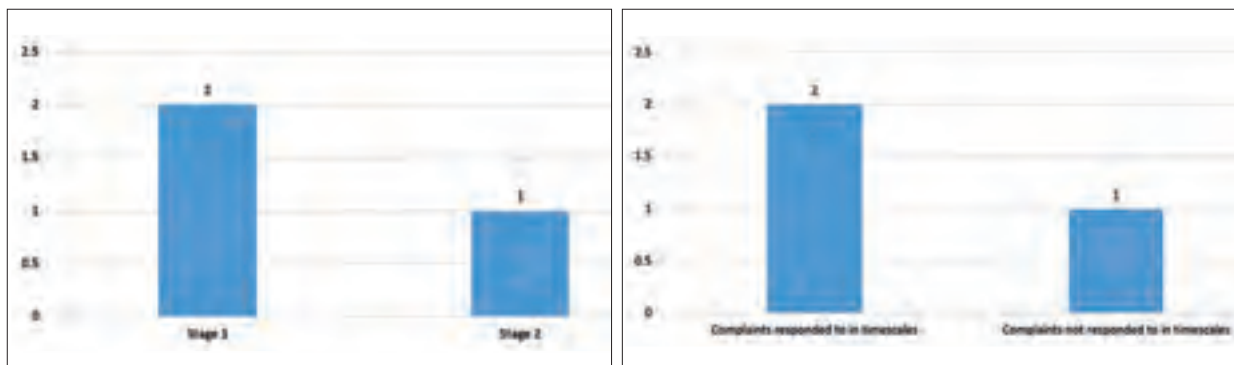
We've carried out a self-assessment against the Code to see how we're performing as a landlord. You can look at the self-assessment at www.dartford.gov.uk/services/housing-complaints.



How we're performing on complaints handling

Number of complaints opened
- 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023

Number of complaints responded to within timescales
- 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023



How we learn from complaints

When we get things wrong we apologise and put things right. This may include looking at changing our policies or procedures to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again, or we may provide training to staff to increase their awareness or skills in a particular area if needed. If it is a complaint about something we haven't done, for example a repair, we'll make sure it gets done right away.



Be the first to find out what's happening in **your area**

My Community Voice is a two-way engagement tool brought to you by Kent Police.

Whether you live, work or socialise in Kent or Medway, My Community Voice provides real-time messages directly from our police officers, staff and volunteers, about matters that may affect you or your community.

Your voice is important to us and we want to hear what concerns or views you may have in the area that is important to you. You can also share messages with others or reply to our alerts if you have information to share.

From crime prevention advice, to the latest updates on scams, appeals or events – you control what information you receive and how you receive it, by email, text or voice message.



Sign up today or to find out more visit www.mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk

Report a crime

Report a non-urgent crime online www.kent.police.uk/report

Talk to us on LiveChat – available 24/7 www.kent.police.uk/contact

In an emergency, if crime is in progress or life is in danger call **999**

If you have a hearing or speech impairment, use our textphone service 18000. Or text us on 999 if you've pre-registered with the emergency SMS service.

www.kent.police.uk   



Feeling lonely is something we can all experience

Everyone can feel lonely from time to time and this is part of being human. But feeling lonely most or all of the time can impact our general wellbeing and mental health.

Many people have experienced loneliness or isolation during the coronavirus pandemic or as a result of other circumstances.

Loneliness and isolation can happen for all sorts of reasons and affect anyone of any age and background. We don't have to be on our own all the time to feel lonely – it can also happen when we're surrounded by other people. Loneliness is when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

Reaching out and having meaningful connections with other people can help us to feel so much better.

There are lots of ways to do this and organisations that provide support:

- Keep in touch with those around you such as friends, family and neighbours – sometimes a friendly chat can make all the difference
- Join an online group or club – focus on something you enjoy
- Visit places where you can just be around other people – such as a park, the cinema or a café
- Try a befriending service – where you're matched with a befriender who can either contact you by phone or in person
- Talk to someone if you're experiencing stress, feelings of anxiety or low mood – tell your GP who can refer you to support such as talking therapies

If you'd like more information on where to go for support, there's lots of information at www.dartford.gov.uk/advice/loneliness.



SCAN ME

DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES

We have always been committed to tackling damp and mould in our properties, and recognise the serious health implications it may have. This includes respiratory problems or other conditions that can impact on the immune system.

To tackle these issues and to reduce damp, mould and condensation, we deliver a range of planned works to help reduce these risks and the likelihood of condensation occurring; including improving insulation and replacing roofs and windows where necessary.

If a damp or mould issue is reported to us, we will respond by arranging an inspection of the property to diagnose the cause of the issue. We will also provide room by room advice and guidance on how to reduce the risks associated with mould growth and we may also arrange for a mould wash kit to be delivered to your home.

To help reduce or stop condensation and mould growth occurring, you can follow these simple steps:

- Cover saucepans and don't leave kettles/pans boiling for longer than necessary.
- Dry clothes outside – or with a window ajar if indoors.
- Don't cover any airbricks or window vents.
- Vent tumble driers outside unless they are designed for indoor use.
- Keep a window slightly open when cooking or bathing.
- Keep doors closed, especially to the kitchen and bathroom.
- When running a bath, run both hot and cold taps together and open a window.
- To help reduce condensation wipe off excess moisture on windows, walls etc. with a dry cloth.
- If mould growth appears, try using a fungicidal mould wash as per the manufacturer's instructions and, if possible, redecorate affected areas using a fungicidal paint.
- Try to maintain an even temperature within your home, i.e. low level heating all day rather than quick blasts of high heat.

We have recently developed a Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy to specifically address these issues. The key aim of our Policy is to raise awareness of damp, mould and condensation, and to set out our pro-active approach to addressing and resolving reports of damp and mould in our properties.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the tenants who responded to our consultation on this Policy.

For more information on damp, mould and condensation you can check out our website www.dartford.gov.uk/condensation.

To report a visible damp or mould issue, or for general advice, please call 01322 343800 or email repairs@dartford.gov.uk or complete our on line repair request from at https://www.dartford.gov.uk/maintenance/repairs-improvements-disabled-adaptations#REP_REPORT

Our Policy on Damp and Mould can be found at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing-policy/housing-strategy-policy-documents>





DO YOU HAVE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR? ARE THERE ANY UNSUNG HEROES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

We'd like to recognise and say a massive 'thank you' to our tenants who go the extra mile to help their neighbours and community.

Throughout the year, we'll present our tenants who've made a positive difference to their neighbours and community with A Good Neighbour Thank You card.

There are all sorts of ways someone can make a positive difference to their neighbours and community. Even a small act of kindness can have a huge impact.

Examples could include:

- helping a neighbour with practical tasks, such as their shopping, collecting prescriptions, walking a dog, gardening, putting out the bins, filling in forms.
- checking in on a neighbour who may be experiencing loneliness and isolation.
- being a friendly face around the neighbourhood who brightens up people's day.
- organising community events to bring neighbours together.
- charity work that has directly benefitted the community.
- generally being a 'good tenant', such as keeping their home and garden to exceptional standard, maintaining communal areas, and working with us on developing policies and procedures.

We'd like to celebrate our tenants who make our communities great places to live. If you know someone who you think should receive a thank you and recognition for what they've done, please let us know. Nomination forms can be found at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/management/good-neighbour-thank-scheme>. Alternatively, contact the Resident Involvement Officer at rio@dartford.gov.uk.

Please tell us who you are and who the person is you wish to nominate. Tell us why you've nominated them in your own words - up to a maximum of 100 words.

The person you nominate should be a Dartford Borough Council tenant and contribute positively to the lives of people or someone in their community.





Zero tolerance to keep you safe

Despite our efforts to maintain a safe and sterile environment within our residential blocks, the storing of items in communal areas and landings, and within stairwell alcoves and cupboards, continues to put lives at risk.

Please allow us to remind you of clause 4.3. of your tenancy agreement, which states:

'You are responsible for:

4.3. Keeping any part of the communal areas as required by the Council clean and tidy, if living in a flat or maisonette and ensure that balconies are kept neat and tidy and free of rubbish, furniture and appliances'

Note that this applies to the following*:

- Prams & pushchairs
- Doormats
- Washing on airers
- Plants & pots
- Bikes & scooters
- Shoes
- Gates installed across communal balconies
- Any item left in a communal area

Kent Fire & Rescue Service informs us that goods stored, or belongings and rubbish disposed of, in communal areas, can be a serious hazard in the event of a fire. They can block escape routes, block access for emergency services and even potentially be subject to arson. They can also be trip hazards and cause injury to other residents.

Dartford Borough Council will be introducing a zero tolerance approach toward any items left in communal areas. Any items found in these areas will be removed forthwith, without prior notice and disposed of**.

Residents must remember:

- Any cupboards within communal areas must not be used for storage
- All exit routes, lobbies and landings must be kept clear
- Anything found in these areas will be removed

Dartford Borough Council thanks you in advance for your cooperation in keeping our residents and their visitors safe.

*Please be advised that any permissions previously granted and/or assumed is hereby revoked.

** Dartford Borough Council will not be held responsible for any loss of property or financial loss as a result of this action.

Let's stay fire safe



A fire can happen at any time but there are some simple things we can all do to **stay fire safe** – in our homes and communal areas.



To find out how to keep **you and your loved ones safe** visit the KHG website:

kenthousinggroup.org.uk/fire-safe

for everyone





Big Christmas Switch On

Christmas has officially begun in Dartford following the Big Christmas Switch On Saturday 18th November.

After poring through hundreds of incredible colouring competition entries from schools across Dartford, Oliver Carty, 8, was selected as this year's lucky winner, and got to help light up the town for Christmas. Oliver joined The Worshipful the Mayor of Dartford Rosanna Currans, Father Christmas, and stars of Orchard West's pantomime 'Beauty and the Beast' in Brewery Square.

Festivities began with Cohesion Plus's roaming entertainment in the High Street, Orchards Shopping Centre and Priory Shopping Centre. From Christmas Mickey and Minnie Mouse to the interactive Show Globe, there was plenty of fun for everyone to enjoy.

Starting off the afternoon of performances at Brewery Square was Orchard West's Ukulele group and signing choir. With Channel 5's Milkshake! presenter, David Ribb, guiding the crowd through each set and even starring in the Christmas Sing-A-Long Show. There were tributes to George Ezra and Freddie Mercury, as well as an appearance from Not the Rolling Stones.

Helping with the big switch-on were some of Orchard West's sparkling pantomime stars – soap star, actress and singer Shona McGarty, Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist John Archer, fellow soap star Harry Reid, and talented performers Emma Jay Thomas and Tom Senior.

Leader of the Council Jeremy Kite MBE said: "What a brilliant way to start Christmas! A big thank you to everyone who came and got involved with the Big Christmas Switch On, as well as to the organisers that brought it together. And don't forget the festivities aren't ending here, we have our favourite Santa's House, Carol Concert and Santa on Tour still to come. So save the dates and we hope to see you there."



We would like to thank the following organisations who have generously supported this year's Big Christmas Switch On: Dartford Borough Council - Orchards Shopping Centre - The Priory Shopping Centre - Orchard West - Sainsbury's - Aldi - Fairfield - Dartford Markets - Dartford Messenger - Cohesion Plus.

The Big Christmas Switch On kicked off Dartford Borough Council's festive calendar. Details about Santa's House (25th & 26th November and 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th December), Santa's Tour (3rd, 10th, 17th, 20th, 21st December) and other great events are available via www.dartford.gov.uk/events.



Rough Sleeper Count

In the early hours of 24th November, officers from Housing Services, Community Safety and the Parks Team were joined by partners from Porchlight & the Dartford Foodbank to complete the annual rough sleeper count on behalf of Dartford Borough Council.

Every year, each Local Authority has to complete this important piece of work and report the number of people found sleeping out to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This is so the Government can monitor and understand the number of people that are actually sleeping rough on the streets of Britain.

It is always completed at the same time of year in order to get a consistent snapshot of the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping. We complete this on a volunteer basis and this year we were lucky enough to have 17 colleagues joining us. Our planning & counting process is independently overseen by someone from the Dartford Foodbank.

A rough sleeper outreach is completed each week in Dartford, led by Porchlight. This weekly task targets areas where any known individual is sleeping who Porchlight might already be working with and any new sites that have been reported to Porchlight or via Streetlink. Due to the regular work that is carried out by Porchlight, the Council is usually already aware of any individual that is rough sleeping and will be searching for a solution for that individual..

As we are getting into the colder months, the Housing Solutions Team keeps a daily watchful eye on the weather forecast in order to decide if we should activate the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol. This is if the weather becomes extreme in any way and there is considered to be a risk to life, then all rough sleepers will be accommodated by Dartford until the weather risk has passed.

We use this time to fully assess their needs.

If you are ever concerned about anyone who appears to be rough sleeping in the Dartford Borough area, please contact triage@dartford.gov.uk or <https://thestreetlink.org.uk/start>



Good Looking Gunn Road!

Improvements made to Gunn Road have given residents a new sense of pride in their homes after works completed this autumn. After reports from residents and estate inspections visits, the dark and uninviting stairwells were considered in need of attention.

DBC Officers and our contractors have worked together to install a new main entrance security door, new flooring for stairs and balconies and new windows. With a lick of paint both inside and out, these areas are now something residents are proud of. Residents' feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with one resident saying they are "over the moon" with the work carried out.

If your block is looking tired and unappealing, get in touch and the team will see what they can do. Call **01322 343800** or email repairs@dartford.gov.uk.

Help us tackle tenancy fraud

Tenancy fraud is the misuse of council tenancies. Some examples include:

- Providing misleading or false information to obtain a property
- Not using the property as your only or main home
- Subletting the property to someone else without permission
- Wrongly claiming succession of a tenancy after the tenant dies
- Passing on the keys to someone else for a one-off payment
- Providing misleading or false information on a right to buy application

Tenancy cheats are preventing us from housing those that may have been waiting a long time and are in desperate need of a council home. We take tenancy fraud very seriously and will take strong action to deal with it.

Help us tackle tenancy fraud by telling us if you suspect someone is committing it. Local residents are very well placed to notice changes in activities within their communities, which may lead to suspicions of tenancy fraud.

Call us using the Fraud Hotline number (01732 227299) and speak to a trained investigator. Or you can leave a message on the unlawful-subletting hotline (0800 032 0031). Or you can contact the Tenancy Fraud Team online at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/management/tenancy-fraud>.

All calls will be treated in the strictest of confidence and every report will be investigated. You can remain anonymous, or you can leave your name and contact details.



Exciting Developments within Housing

The way that Dartford Housing Services manages its properties is changing! On 11 December 2023, the Council went 'live' with its new housing management system. 'One Housing' replaces the current housing management system called 'Academy' which has been in use here in Dartford since the early 1990's.

The Council appreciate, despite staff spending the last four years developing and building One Housing into a housing management system which we hope will provide many more benefits to both our customers and staff, the implementation of any new IT system can be unpredictable and challenging.

Here to help at Christmas

We know times are challenging and we want to remind you that we are here to help. One of the most important things is to check that you are claiming everything that you are entitled to and we're by the phone if you need our advice. There are some very trusted sources of advice - we've listed some below and you'll find further support on page 10.

www.entitledto.co.uk or www.turn2us.org.uk/
Free benefits calculators to see if you are eligible for any further benefits.

We're letting you know in advance, in case any technical issues during the following period result in delays to our day to day processes and tasks.

The change will result in the temporary withdrawal of the Tenant and Leaseholders Portal until early next year and we apologise for the inconvenience. However once fully operational, One Housing will provide you with an advanced range of self-service options via the new Tenant Portal.

Electricity and Gas Payment

Have you received and used your payment from the government to help with your gas and electricity bills? If you need help or assistance please call your supplier.

www.moneyhelper.org.uk

If you're worried about debt, MoneyHelper is here to listen and give free, impartial, trusted guidance. Online or over the phone, you'll get clear money and pensions guidance, and pointers to trusted services, if you need more support. Check out what other types of support you may be entitled to on our website www.dartford.gov.uk.

10 reasons to choose Crystal Insurance Scheme this winter



- ❄️ Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge).
- ❄️ Apply over the phone or by completing an application form.
- ❄️ You don't need to have special door or window locks (just a lockable front door).
- ❄️ Covers theft, water damage, fire.
- ❄️ Covers tenants improvements (up to £2,000 or 20% of the sum insured whichever is greater).
- ❄️ Accidental damage to TV's and aerials and home computers is covered as standard (excludes items designed to be portable including mobile phones, ipods etc). A £50 excess may apply, full details are available on request.
- ❄️ Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible.
- ❄️ Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen.
- ❄️ The sum insured will be increased by £1,500 or 15% (whichever is the greater) for one month before and after Christmas to cover presents bought or received (excludes theft which does not involve forcible or violent entry into your home).
- ❄️ Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000).
- ❄️ Optional extras are available for an additional premium.

Exclusions & limits apply. A copy of the policy wording is available on request.

**Ask your landlord for an application pack or
to apply for cover today, call Crystal Insurance on:**

0345 450 7286

email: crystal@thistleinsurance.co.uk or visit www.crystal-insurance.co.uk

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For information about what we do with personal data please see our Privacy Policy at www.crystal-insurance.co.uk/Privacy-Policy

THISTLE
TENANT RISKS 



HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MAINS WIRED SMOKE ALARM BATTERY

Your smoke alarm is fitted with a back up battery. When the back up battery needs changing, your smoke alarm will sound a BEEP every 30 seconds. Any other continuous beeps or sirens means that the alarm has been activated and you will need to vacate the property immediately and get to a safe area. Please follow these instructions on how to change the battery.

STEP 1

Please ensure that you have a safe platform to stand on when changing the battery and that all risks are assessed and minimised beforehand. If in doubt ask someone else to assist you.

Locate the slot on your smoke alarm.
Insert a flat head screw driver (or something else that will fit) and this will release a catch inside the smoke alarm.



STEP 2

Slide the smoke alarm cover away from you and this will come away from the plate that is fixed to the ceiling.



STEP 3

Remove the old battery and attach the new battery to the connector.

Once completed, slide the cover back onto the plate which is fixed to the ceiling.



If you are aged 65 or over, disabled or living in one of our Schemes the Handyman may be able to change a battery for you. Tenants are responsible for providing the battery.

If you have any problems or have any questions please call the housing repairs team on 01322 343800 or email repairs@dartford.gov.uk.





Making your money and pension choices clearer - [MoneyHelper.org.uk](https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk)

If you're worried about debt, MoneyHelper is here. Here to listen and give free, impartial, trusted guidance. Based around you and backed by government.

Whatever your circumstances or plans, MoneyHelper is on your side.

Online or over the phone, you'll get clear money and pensions guidance, and pointers to trusted services, if you need more support.

Open to everyone, MoneyHelper is helping people to clear their debts, reduce spending and make the most of their income. To support loved ones, plan ahead for major purchases and find out about entitlements. To build up savings and pensions, and know their options.

For money help all in one place that's free to use, just visit www.moneyhelper.org.uk

 **MoneyHelper**



DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Santa on tour



FREE!

- * SEE SANTA'S VINTAGE FIRE ENGINE *
- * FREE GIFTS FOR CHILDREN *
- * NO TICKET REQUIRED *
- * JUST WRAP UP WARM AND TURN UP *

TOUR DATES

Santa will meet children
OUTSIDE the following venues

SUNDAY 3RD DECEMBER

TREE ESTATE. 11.00am
Community Centre. Cedar Road Play Area, DA1 2RS
GREENHITHE. 1.30pm
Ingress Park. Junction of Ingress Park Ave & Prioress Crescent, DA9 9GE
EBBSFLEET. 3pm
Platinum Jubilee Park, Castle Hill

SUNDAY 10TH DECEMBER

TOWN. Phoenix Quarter. 10am
River Mill Primary School, Central Rd, DA1 5XR
WILMINGTON. 12.30pm
Wilmington Memorial Hall, High Rd, DA2 7DW
THE BRIDGE ESTATE. 2pm
Spirits Rest Horse & Animal Sanctuary, Binnie Rd, Dartford DA1 5RB
STONE. 4.30pm
Stone Pavilion, Hayes Rd, Stone, DA9 9EF

SUNDAY 17TH DECEMBER

FLEET ESTATE. 11.15am
Fleetdown Community Centre, car Park, Off Swaledale Rd, DA2 6JZ
SUTTON AT HONE & HAWLEY. 12.30pm
Sutton at Hone Primary School (car park), Church Road, DA4 7RN
SOUTHFLEET VILLAGE HALL. 1.45pm
Dale Rd, Southfleet, DA13 9NX
DARENTH. 3pm
Darenth Hall, Ladywood Rd, DA2 7LL

WEDNESDAY 20TH DECEMBER

WEST HILL. St Anselm's Church 10am
Church Car Park, 89 West Hill, DA1 2HJ
DARTFORD CRICKET CLUB. 12pm
Hesketh Park, Pilgrims Way, DA1 1QZ
BEAN. 3pm
The Black Horse Pub, High St, DA2 8AS

THURSDAY 21ST DECEMBER

TEMPLE HILL. 10.30am
Temple Hill Square, DA1 5HY.
SWANSCOMBE. 12.30pm
Town Council Offices, The Grove, DA10 0GA
LONGFIELD. 2.30pm
Waitrose car park, 63 Station Road, Longfield, DA3 7QA
JOYDENS WOOD. 4.30pm
Bexley Park Sports & Social Club, Calvert Drive, Dartford DA2 7GA

WWW.DARTFORD.GOV.UK/EVENTS

The quickest and easiest way to contact the Council is via our website www.dartford.gov.uk and the vast majority of Council services from paying your rent to reporting a repair or requesting a new bin can be accessed through www.dartford.gov.uk/do-it-online. At any other time, call the emergency out of hours line on 0345 634 1212.



If you really need to call us, phone 01322 343434 Monday to Friday between 8.45am and 5.15pm (4.45pm on Fridays).

Housing contacts

Allocations:

e: allocations@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343907

Housing Solutions (Homelessness):

e: triage@dartford.gov.uk

Tenancy Services:

(for help with tenancy issues, anti-social behaviour, etc): e: housingstatemanagement@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343133

Housing Repairs:

w: www.dartford.gov.uk/do-it-online

e: repairs@dartford.gov.uk t: 01322 343800

Housing Services General Enquiries:

e: housing.services@dartford.gov.uk

Leaseholder Service Charges:

e: leaseholders@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343368

Rents Team (for help with rents, payments and arrears): e: rents@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343134

Resident Involvement Team:

e: rio@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343682

Right to Buy:

e: righttobuy@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343832/343211

Housing Schemes:

e: supported@dartford.gov.uk

Housing Policy & Development Team:

e: housingpolicy@dartford.gov.uk

Other useful contacts

Benefits:

t: 01322 343705

Senior Housing Scheme & Finance Officer:

t: 01322 343366

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB):

w: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/north-west-kent

Advice line: 0300 330 9001 (Monday - Friday, 10am - 3pm)

Community Centres:

community.centres@dartford.gov.uk

t: 01322 343902/343066

Community Safety Unit:

w: www.dartford.gov.uk/community-safety

t: 01322 343000

Council Tax:

t: 01322 343700

The National Domestic Violence Helpline

t: 0808 200 0247 Domestic Abuse Kent and Medway

w: www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk

Kent Highways:

w: www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel

t: 03000 41 81 81

Payments:

To pay rent, service charges, Council Tax or set up a Direct Debit

w: www.dartford.gov.uk/do-it-online

t: 0345 6343001

Refuse, Recycling & Cleansing:

t: 01322 343290

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