



# HOUSING MATTERS

## Your homes, your news, your views

### Hello

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



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

### News at your finger tips

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

**[www.ashford.gov.uk/  
housing-news](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-news)**

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

### Competition time!

How many water saving devices have been installed by our project with Cenergist? The answer can be found within this newsletter. Answers can be emailed along with your name, address and telephone number to [tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk). They can also be posted to Tenant Engagement at Ashford Borough Council, Tannery Lane, TN23 1PL. One lucky tenant or leaseholder, drawn at random from the correct entries, will win a £25 Love2shop voucher. Closing date for entries is 31 August 2024.

Congratulations to our previous winner, Miss Hughes from Willesborough, who won the voucher in our spring edition.

Full competition terms and conditions: [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-matters-comp](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-matters-comp)

## Contents insurance

All tenants should have contents insurance to protect belongings against theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes, and other household risks. We have partnered with a company called Thistle Tenant Risks who offer insurance specifically for social housing tenants called the Crystal Insurance Scheme.

They offer flexible options, such as fortnightly or monthly by cash (at post office/pay zone outlets), monthly via direct debit, or annually by cheque, postal order, debit/credit card). Anyone living in social housing is eligible.

They do not perform credit checks, and do not ask the baffling array of questions that other insurance companies ask.

They can be contacted by telephone on **0345 450 7286** and you can request a call back at a time convenient to you. Cover can also be applied for via their website [www.crystal-insurance.co.uk](http://www.crystal-insurance.co.uk) where more detail about what they offer can be found. Please note other companies also offer contents insurance.



## Estate inspections

Every fortnight the housing team visit areas of the borough to carry out estate inspections. This is an opportunity for anyone in those areas to come out and meet housing officers for a chat, or raise any concerns or issues they may have with their estate or property. If you would like to attend any of the visits please get in touch with Tenant Engagement so that they can make arrangements with you on **01233 330573** or email [tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.contact@ashford.gov.uk)

**15 July** - Wye

**29 July** - Charing &  
Charing Heath

**12 August** - Tenterden &  
St Michaels

**27 August** - Woolreeds area

## Disrepair scam warning

We have received reports from tenants about 'disrepair scam' telephone calls from people claiming to be from our repairs team. These companies cold call saying that they are from the 'Repairs Team', 'Housing Maintenance Department' or 'working on behalf of ABC'. They will sometimes confirm your name and address making them sound genuine.

They tend to be claims management companies offering no-win, no-fee services to make disrepair claims, however some housing providers have found tenants left in debt by signing up to agreements through these calls, where they are still having to pay court costs, even on a no-win, no-fee basis.

If you receive a call about repairs or anything to do with your property that you are not sure about, please call our repairs team directly on **01233 330366** or get in touch with your estates officer using the details on [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer) to check. Calls from our repairs team will be displayed on your phone as the main council switchboard number and the team will leave a voicemail if you have one.

If for any reason you are unhappy with any housing or repairs service you have received, our complaints procedure allows tenants to raise concerns and request that we 'make things right'. Tenants can log complaints by telephone **01233 331111**, in writing, email [complaints@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@ashford.gov.uk) or online [www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints).

If a tenant remains dissatisfied with our complaints process, they have the benefit of the Housing Ombudsman who can impartially investigate complaints and has the power to award compensation and order repairs.



## Refugee Resettlement Team

The Refugee Resettlement team currently supports around 200 individuals who have been resettled in the borough from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine. The team supports families allocated by the Home Office after they arrive into the country for three years to help them to integrate and become independent. Their focus is on ensuring the refugees reach their maximum potential and remove barriers for them to do this. We have families living in a variety of housing from private rented accommodation, social housing, and in temporary accommodation.



We recently celebrated World Refugee Day on 20 June. An international day designated by the United Nations to honour refugees around the globe, shining a light on the rights, needs and dreams of those forced to flee.

The team hosted an afternoon with arts and crafts, buffet, henna and a talk from a representative in the Nepalese community. This event will be one of many that the team host to work together with all communities in Ashford to celebrate integration and cultural representation. We encourage and welcome all residents to take part if they see an event coming up for us all to learn more about others.

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## Communal storage trial

Following feedback from tenants during our communal clear all back in February, we have been looking into communal storage space. This is likely to be secure storage placed externally to communal blocks so that tenants requiring it can easily put mobility scooters, bicycles, prams, etc. there. This means that communal areas can continue to remain clear for fire safety reasons, but also there is more space for tenants inside their individual properties. We are looking to have electricity fed to the storage so that lithium batteries, seen on electric bikes and mobility scooters, can be charged more safely outside of flat accommodation.

We will be running a trial at one of our blocks and engaging with tenants to ask whether they think it is a good idea, ask how much they might use it and listen to what questions they have about the project.



## New housing portfolio holder

We would like to introduce our new Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Noel Ovenden. Noel is currently the Leader of



Cllr Noel Ovenden

the council and has been with the council for more than 10 years developing a wealth of knowledge about the borough. We look forward to working with him to help achieve great outcomes for our tenants.

We would also like to say thank you to our outgoing Portfolio Holder Councillor Bill Barrett. Bill helped spearhead many projects to help tackle homelessness and make housing improvements in the borough.

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## Have your say

We are always keen to hear your views about our housing service and also about the council as a whole. The council has an online consultation platform that allows residents to get involved and have their say about local services, issues and events. More recently a consultation for derelict land to be used for affordable homes, and discussions about the plan for the borough were featured. Resident panels and participation from tenants specifically, will also be run from this page in the near future. [haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk](http://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk)

## Garden competition

Our independent living schemes took part in a garden competition in June and competition was fierce with tenants showing us how green fingered they are. The schemes, appropriately called Dahlia, provide accommodation for over-55s with an emphasis on independence. They are definitely nothing like a retirement home with things such as in-house hairdressers and nail bar and more regular social events and activities that you could ever attend. The flats and bungalows are set in lovely surroundings enhanced by communal and private gardens and plenty of window boxes and containers. Having on-site Housing Officers to help the schemes running smoothly, they are very much vibrant communities.

We had four categories in the competition to ensure those with lots or a little space can take part. The winners received £75, with runners up receiving £25.



### Best Communal Garden

1st prize: Luckley House, Wye

Runner up: Danemore, Tenterden



### Best Indoor Plant

1st prize: Mrs Prosser, Monypenny

Runner up: Mrs Newman, Cotton Hill House



### Best Private Garden

1st prize: Mr & Mrs Tiltman, Monypenny

Runner up: Ms Hannaford, Carters Wood



### Best Basket/Container

1st prize: Ms Sparkes, Cotton Hill House

Runner up: Mr Blake, Gerlach House



## Thank you to all our entrants

A big thank you to all who took part, there was such an array of flowers and plants on display. If you think you might be the borough's next Alan Titchmarsh, keep an eye out for the competition next year which will be rolled out to all tenants.

## More about Dahlia

Our schemes are located across the borough in more rural locations such as Wye and Tenterden, through to more central Ashford areas such as Willesborough and Kennington.

Tenants can get involved as much or as little as they want with activities that are put on at the schemes, with upcoming events from fish and chip lunches to musical evenings taking place. People are welcome to attend events in any scheme, fostering a friendly community and a hectic social life!

For more information about our Dahlia Independent Living Schemes please visit their webpage [www.ashford.gov.uk/independent-living](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/independent-living) or call the main contact number **01233 330688** to request a brochure.



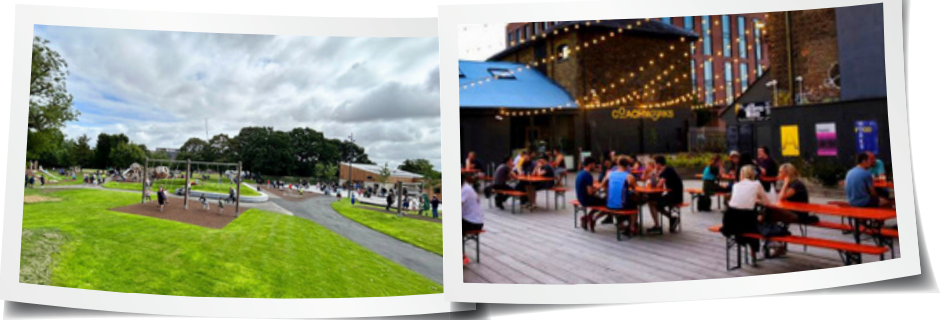
A recent event held at our Danemore scheme with an afternoon tea and entertainment from singer Collete.

## Don't forget!

To check your smoke alarms at least once a month. If you live in a block of flats, make sure to read the fire plan for your building. For more safety advice [www.ashford.gov.uk/living-safely-in-your-home](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/living-safely-in-your-home)

## Get out and about this summer

There are so many things to do across the borough during the summer months including lots of free events and activities. To find out about what's on and find some inspiration, visit our tourist webpages at [www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk)



## Estate days

We are pulling together estate community days where we will have fun things to do as well as having services that you might want advice from, such as our repairs team, housing officers and dog warden. There will be food and drink and a variety of activities to get involved in, with the first one planned for mid-August. We will be in touch with local tenants and will publicise the event for others to attend. This will be followed by more events around the borough. For more details [www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement)

## Communal colour!

Those living in blocks of flats will start to see a bit more colour in your corridors very soon. We will be refreshing the communal noticeboards across blocks to provide a more vibrant, colourful outlook. We have pulled together some key topics that tenants ask us about, such how to report issues and contact their housing officers. We will also put up some important notices and reminders to all tenants to help make our shared spaces nicer places to inhabit.



## Energy efficiency updates

Our Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund scheme in conjunction with E.on is helping boost the energy ratings of some of our properties. Soon these homes will benefit from efficiency measures that will improve the thermal comfort of homes and help to reduce utility bills. External wall insulation is soon to be fitted which not only should make properties warmer but can improve the way a home looks.

To date, 123 efficiency measures have been installed such as solar panels, cavity wall and loft insulation. A further 443 properties have had their retrofit assessment surveys, to understand what measures they will require.

If you have any questions about the project please contact our engagement officer on [shdf.contact@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:shdf.contact@ashford.gov.uk) or call 01233 330598



Solar panels being installed

## Remember...

All contractors that we use should show you their ID before entering your home. If this does not happen please let your estates officer know so that we can raise this with our contractors.

# Housing Projects update

RIDGE

## Housing condition survey

In order to get a better understanding of our homes we launched our Stock Condition Survey Programme in May. We work with Ridge Partners Ltd to help conduct these surveys.

The surveys will look at the visual condition of your home's components such as windows and doors, and we will utilise this data to assess the life cycle of our stock. This helps us to forward plan and put together a replacement programme that will put our residents needs at the forefront. We will also look out for safeguarding issues, damp and mould and any health and safety concerns providing a proactive approach to your safety. We aim to survey all our stock over a 12-month timeframe with data being stored on our internal system. Surveys are being completed in three phases, so far we have completed 664 surveys.

The survey team will normally visit between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday and the visit should take no more than an hour. Please note that photographs will be taken as part of the survey. If you are not at home when surveyors call, they will leave a calling card for you to get back in touch with them to book an appointment.

It is important for surveyors to have access to your property as every home is different. Further information can be found at [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-homes-survey](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-homes-survey).

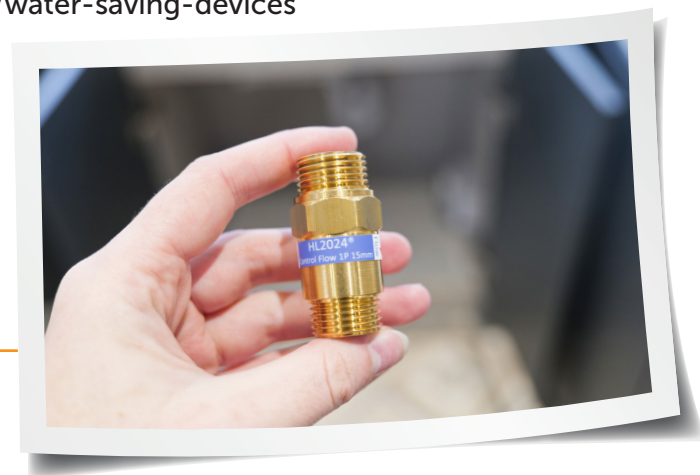
## Water saving devices

The team at Cenergist have now installed 1,258 water saving devices in homes to help reduce water consumption and help save on energy bills. The project is set to continue into the autumn and Cenergist will aim to book an appointment that works for you to come and visit to install.

Please be reassured that the team from Cenergist will only fit devices if they are appropriate for the property and for you. They will always leave a customer care card after visiting so that you can contact them with any questions, or in the event that you are not happy with an install.

We have had some lovely feedback from tenants to say how polite and friendly the installers were.

For more information go to [www.ashford.gov.uk/water-saving-devices](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/water-saving-devices)



# Help and advice

## Anti-social behaviour

Each issue dedicates space to providing information about support for tenants. Now summer has arrived and we spend more time out and about, we might see cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) increase. Below feature a couple of agencies that can really help if you are experiencing issues in your neighbourhood. Remember that any incidences of ASB should be reported online [www.ashford.gov.uk/report](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/report) or to your Estates Officer and Police, if necessary. We take all reports of ASB seriously and are committed to working with tenants to investigate and resolve cases alongside appropriate agencies.

### Ashford Mediation Service

Ashford Borough Council partners with an organisation called the Ashford Mediation Service (AMS). The AMS is a registered charity that has been operating since 1997, that provides free confidential and impartial mediation services to residents of Ashford who are experiencing conflict with others. They provide both advice and act as an intermediary to help two parties to resolve issues. They will not take sides or blame anyone and will offer a safe and neutral space to meet to discuss any problems.

They can help neighbours to resolve disputes over things such as noise, parking and garden boundaries, and can help with family and work place disputes too. With more than 1,000 cases handled so far they have a 92% success rate in mediating successfully.

After getting in touch with the service, they will make arrangements to initially meet each party separately (either online or at another agreed location). They will hear both sides and then will work with both parties to understand what the important issues are for them and what they want as an outcome of the dispute. A voluntary agreement (although not legally binding) can be put into place with parties as part of the process.

Further information about Ashford Mediation Service can be found on their website [www.ashfordmediation.co.uk](http://www.ashfordmediation.co.uk). They can be contacted by completing an online form on their website, via telephone on **07845914838** or emailing them on [info@ashfordmediation.co.uk](mailto:info@ashfordmediation.co.uk)

Their website also has downloadable guides on their services in various languages catering to communities that live in the borough - English, Hindi, Nepalese and Polish.



### ASB help

ASB Help is a registered charity running for the past 10 years, that offers advice and support to victims of anti-social behaviour and helps to raise awareness of victims rights. It also works with those that handle cases of anti-social behaviour to promote best practice in managing cases. They run an annual ASB awareness week which Ashford Borough Council will look to be involved with later in the year.

Their website is full of useful information and advice [www.asbhelp.co.uk](http://www.asbhelp.co.uk)



For guidance on how our housing team handle cases of ASB and to see what is classed as anti-social behaviour, please visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour). Our Housing and our Community Safety teams have a new IT system to ensure there is a better journey for parties involved in ASB. The new software allows those involved in the case to upload evidence, see case progress and be kept informed.



## Eat Well Spend Less

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

The next events run from 10am-2pm are:

**7 August - Singleton Village Hall, Hoxton Close TN23 5LB**

**18 September - Victoria Park, Jemmett Road, TN23 4AD**

More details of further events can be found on our engagement webpage

[www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement)

## Regulator of Social Housing TSM submission

We have now submitted our annual housing statistics to the regulator of Social Housing. These statistics, called Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), were submitted by all large social housing providers across the country. These allow tenants, providers and the Regulator to assess how we are performing against others.

Details of our performance showing the results of the tenant satisfaction survey and statistics regarding our repairs, safety compliance, complaints and anti-social behaviour can all be viewed on our dedicated web page [www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-satisfaction-survey](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-satisfaction-survey)



## Your feedback counts

We have been getting in touch with those that have previously logged complaints to see how we can do better. Although praised for being helpful and polite and making it easy to raise a complaint, the timelines of our responses and ensuring that we fully address all areas of a complaint, were cited as something we need to work on.

We also surveyed tenants currently living in temporary accommodation in the borough to find out about their experiences and what they think of move on accommodation, similar to what is being built in Henwood. Move on accommodation, that provides a stepping stone of more independence and support before a move to a more permanent home, was overwhelmingly positive.

Thank you to all tenants that took part in both surveys we really appreciate your time and responses. Your feedback goes straight into actions to make the service better.

## Annual housing report

We will shortly be publishing our annual report for housing services covering the past financial year from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It gives a quick summary of housing projects, where rental income is spent, with a sprinkling of statistics. This year the report will only be published online but copies can be requested and popped into the post for you to read upon request. To read the digital copy once it goes live, go to [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-annual-report](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-annual-report). To request a hard copy, get in touch with our Tenant Engagement team.



## Useful contacts

Report repairs or damp/mould: [www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair) or call 01233 330366

Raise a complaint: [www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints) or call 01233 331111

Your Neighbourhood Housing Officer: [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-officer) or call 01233 330688

Housing help and advice: [www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-help](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-help)

Welfare Intervention Team: [www.ashford.gov.uk/welfare-reform](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/welfare-reform) or call 01233 331111

Tenant Engagement Team: [www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-engagement) or call 01233 330573

