

Tenant and Leaseholder News



No. 2

IN YOUR SPRING ISSUE

Tenants views - Peter from Histon

New Council Housing planned

Get involved

- *Scrutiny*
- *Complaints*
- *Village Voice*

Best Garden Competition

Rents

Welfare Reform information

Neighbourhood Support

Helping tenants back into work

New Sheltered Housing visiting support service

Message from the Housing 'Boss'

Garages

Out & about in the area

The new Green Deal



Hello

Welcome to your new Tenant and Leaseholder newsletter.

My name is Mark Howell and I am one of the 57 elected Councillors who together run South Cambs District Council.

I represent the Papworth & Elsworth ward where I live and work. I work for the Papworth Trust helping to rehabilitate recently disabled people and get them back into employment.

At South Cambs the Council is run by a Cabinet (very much like central government is) and I was appointed as the Portfolio Holder for Housing in 2009, but I've been an elected councillor since May 1999

My job as the "housing boss" is to oversee the entire housing service the council staff provides to you. I have regular meetings with the Director of Housing and Heads of Service and make decisions and recommendations on housing policy, procedure, tenancy issues, budgets, land sales and performance targets at the Housing Portfolio meetings. I also attend Cabinet meetings and of course meetings of Full Council to represent your housing service.

The Housing Portfolio meetings are advertised on our website, and are listed in this newsletter; and held in the early evening at the council offices in Cambourne. They are open to the public and I would urge you to come along to see the decision making process in operation.

Recently, as a result of decisions I made 403 people have been deregistered from bidding for our homes on the Homelink Choice based lettings system because they had no local connection, making it easier for local people to access housing with us. I have approved the use of introductory tenancies for new tenants, to ensure that their housing is appropriate for their needs, and that should tenants misbehave we can deal with the issues more effectively. For new tenants I have introduced flexible tenancies, to make sure that we keep our housing for those in most need of it over time.

In the upcoming Portfolio Holder meeting I'll be looking at the new housing complaints policy, housing service plan, and an update on the Home Improvement Agency amongst other things.

I must stress to you that neither I nor any other Councillor is allowed to be involved in the allocation of housing.

Coming up on the horizon for you to keep a look out for are two initiatives that have my full support - they are:

- The creation, training and support of a tenant scrutiny panel. In fact this is one of the overall Council's key aims for 2013/14
- If tenants want one - the creation, training and support for a designated tenant panel dealing with complaints.

There is more about both of these initiatives in this newsletter. Please take the time to complete the survey about a complaints panel and send it back to us.



Best Kept Gardens 2013

Every year the number of Best Kept Garden entrants, categories and prizes grow!

For any green fingered children out there ask your parents or nan or grandad to enter you into the Best Childrens Plot.

Fantastic prizes from our sponsor, Scotsdale's Garden Centre, are on offer for the winners of each category and if you're not green-fingered, but know a tenant who is, please do encourage them to enter.

The closing date for entries is Friday 21 June. Judging will take place in late June through to early July, with winners receiving their trophies, certificates and prizes at a special presentation evening at Scotsdales Garden Centre during the autumn.

Send to: Gill Anderton, South Cambs District Council, Cambourne Business Park, Camborne, CB23 6EA or **apply online** at www.scambs.gov.uk/bestgardens



Yes – I am an SCDC housing tenant or leaseholder and would like to enter:

- Best kept garden
- Best kept vegetable garden
- Best new tenant (April 2012 - April 2013)
- Best sheltered housing scheme communal gardens
- Best window box or container garden
- Best children's plot
- Best greenhouse (vegetables)
- Best greenhouse (flowers)
- Carol Johnson wildflower garden award

You can enter in more than one category.

Please write your name, address and contact number below:

Name: _____

Address: _____



Telephone number: _____

Tenant Group Calendar Event Dates

April 2013

Tuesday 2nd - Disability Forum Meeting Denson Close Waterbeach @ 2pm - 4pm

Monday 8th - TPG Meeting Denson Close Waterbeach @ 6.30pm - 8.45pm

May 2013

Please call 01954 713295 to check as the following are provisional dates with venues still to be confirmed

Monday 13th - TPG Meeting @ 6.30 - 8.45pm

June 2013

Monday 3rd - TPG Meeting @ 6:30 - 8:45pm

Tuesday 4th - Disability Forum Meeting - @ 2pm - 4pm

July 2013

Monday 1st - TPG Meeting @ 6.30 - 8:45pm

August 2013

Monday 5th - TPG Meeting @ 6.30 - 8:45pm

September 2013

Monday 2nd - TPG Meeting @ 6.30 - 8:45pm

Please note - if you need transport to and from the meetings we can arrange for you. We will also pay childcare costs invoiced from a registered child minder.

Message in a Bottle

'Message in a Bottle' (MIAB) is an emergency information scheme that could save someone's life! You place a small plastic bottle in your fridge containing details of any other family, friends or local organisations who can take over your caring role in an emergency. Then you put specially designed stickers on your fridge door and on your front door to let people know it's there. This means that should the emergency services need to come to your house they will know exactly where to look for this important information

The Message in a Bottle (MIAB) pack comprises will be available from your housing officer or estate management officer at the council.

The cost of the bottles is being borne by a combination of some money from the supported housing budget, as well as money from the tenant participation budget in recognition of the initiative being championed by the tenants and leaseholders in the Disability Forum.

What is in the pack and what do I do?

- A Bottle
- A Form
- 2 Stickers

Complete the details on the form.

Put it into the bottle supplied and place in the door compartment of your fridge.

The Emergency Services will know to look for it in the event of being called to your home.

They will be alerted by the use of the two special Green Emergency/Green Cross stickers.

The other sticker is placed on the INSIDE of your front door.

One is stuck on the fridge door.


All Emergency Services are aware of the Message in a Bottle scheme, and will locate the bottle and pass it on to a doctor or hospital personnel in an emergency.





Planning Ahead

The Affordable Homes Service Plan was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder at his March meeting. This sets out the key actions for the service to take forward over the coming year.

These include:


 Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation. In the current climate the number of households approaching the Council as homeless is increasing. This means that we are having to put families into bed & breakfast accommodation which is not something we want to be doing as it is both costly and unsuitable.


 We want to look at alternative ways of providing additional housing, such as equity share, private rented and outright sale. We have already started work on this by setting up a new arms-length limited company to enable us to buy, build, sell and rent properties across the district. The company will operate in conjunction with plans to build the first Council homes in over 60 years.


 We are looking to redevelop the hostel site at Waterbeach to provide new self-contained units whilst still providing a supportive environment for homeless families and single people.





Building works are expected to start in the Autumn.

 We will investigate the options for upgrading or redeveloping some of council homes that are of poor standard and expensive to heat.

 Delivering on our Warm Homes Strategy by continuing to install solar panels and introducing new energy efficient heating solutions such as improving internal and external insulation.

 We will be working with the Tenant Participation Group and other tenants to set up an independent tenant scrutiny panel.

 Developing our business case for the tender of the new Supporting People contract for older people which will fund the support element of our sheltered housing schemes.

 Continue to look for suitable sites to accommodate the needs of gypsies and travellers.

These are just some of the main actions set out within the Service Plan. If you are interested to know more, a copy of the plan is on our website at www.scamb.gov.uk/content/council-performance-and-service-plans or it is available on request.

New homes in our villages

Your housing department does many different things. One of them is working with housing associations, planners, land owners and lawyers to bring new affordable housing developments into being.

Such a development recently completed at Challis Green, Barrington, is a good example the housing department's partnership working, in this case with Hundreds Housing Association, The Green Charity and the builder Hill Partnerships

What was built?

39 timber frame homes were built comprising:

 4 bungalows - social rent

 3 apartments - social rent

 22 houses - 11 social rent and 11 shared ownership

What is special about this development?

This exciting development in a traditional, rural setting combined modern construction techniques and practices with a sympathetic understanding of community needs and the council's standards to create a sustainable, attractive and affordable cluster of houses around an extension to the village green.



Village Voice

South Cambs is a great place to live; with over 100 villages spread over 350 square miles, and we have homes in 94 of these villages.

Most of our tenants/leaseholders in these villages are the silent majority, who do not get actively involved in meetings about the service, via events many of the other forums we run.



We are looking for tenants/leaseholders who can represent views of other tenants/leaseholders in their neighbourhood, by volunteering to be a village voice.

Village Voice - What is it?

It is - **Your Voice** - You could become the point of contact with the council for your village:

- A way of getting involved in helping the Council provide better services.
- A good way of getting local village views across to the Council.
- A platform for collaboration between tenants in a village, local members, Housing team, Parish Council etc
- A way to feed information to the tenant scrutiny process.
- A way of you "helping us to make things better for everyone".



You have first-hand experience of the service so only you can tell us how we're doing. By using the information you give us we can improve the service to meet the needs of local tenants. By taking part you can make a real difference to your home and local community. Let us work together to create Village Voice system that works for all of us.

We are now seeking new volunteers.

Your opinions about your home and neighbourhood are very important.

- Representing your community and working with us to identify issues and solutions
- We will listen to your views
- Keep you informed
- Ask what you think of the service
- Involve you in making decisions that affect you.

You do not need any specific skills?

What we really need are your views, opinions, ideas and comments. Without these, how can we be sure that we are providing the services you need? You can give as much or as little time as you like.

Getting involved also gives you the chance to develop your skills through the training and support that we offer which may help you back into employment, with twice yearly training and information events.

Although, we do not pay people to get involved, we will cover related expenses such as travel expenses, childcare (registered child minder) and car parking costs.

We will provide admin support i.e. stationary, photocopying, and printing.

Village Voice relaunch event

Come along on **Friday May 30th** from 10am to 1pm (lunch provided) to an event at the Council offices where you will meet other like minded volunteers, some of the housing team and your resident involvement team. This event is intended to give you a flavour of what being a village voice is all about and will not commit you to becoming one. If you are interested in attending please contact Helen Pagram on 01954 713295

Garages

We are always looking at ways of being more efficient, saving money, and increasing our income so we can continue to provide an excellent housing service to you.

We reviewed many areas of our operation in 2011, including a review of all their garage sites in November of that year.

The results were interesting - highlighting the sites which were used and those that were under used, as well as the condition of the garages. Following this review a proposal was made on each garage site within the district. The proposals were to either

- Improve the site
- Redevelop the site
- Sell the site

We budgeted for the next year to focus in on these proposals and the financial year of 2012-2013 saw a number of successes including the refurbishment of:

- ☛ 10 garages at Macaulay Avenue Great Shelford
- ☛ 7 garages at Davey Crescent Great Shelford
- ☛ 48 garages in Coolidge Gardens Cottenham.

We are about to finish off the year with the knock down and rebuild of seven garages at Saffron Road Sawston.

Before



The after photo will be in the next issue



Our Housing strategy and development team are now looking at the sites that were identified for redevelopment for social housing to assess their viability especially as part of our new initiative to build our own council homes again.

The first new council funded council home site to go ahead is at Chalklands, Linton.

A former garage site where we are building 4 one bedroom houses for rent.

The garage sites that are under used but we do not find viable for redevelopment, or too small for any redevelopment, we will sell on the open market. The proceeds of any sale will go into the budget to improve the garages we will be keeping.



Garage improvement works

Coolidge Gardens Cottenham:

Before



After



Davey Crescent Great Shelford:

Before



After



Macaulay Avenue Great Shelford

Before



After



If you are interested in renting a garage from us please contact 08450 450 051 between 8:00am - 5:30pm or you can apply online at www.scambs.gov.uk/content/apply-rent-council-garage

Rental amount is £7.78; any further information can be located on our website at: www.scambs.gov.uk/content/rent-council-garage or please call ask for a garage leaflet to be sent out to you.

Out and about in your area

Computer Whizzers at Whittlesford Communal Room

Whittlesford Sheltered Housing Communal room have had a Community Access point (for computers), for a bout 8 years.

This is run in partnership with the County Council. At first a lady came and taught some residents how to use the computers and they in turn taught others. Nicky Linsdell (Sheltered Estate Officer) recently encouraged them to learn other skills that the County Council were offering. For 3 months they learnt the Kindle, which they read books on. Next came the Wii, fun and games for all. Now they are going onto Google Nexus, which is a smaller version of the iPad.

What will be next?



Keeping Fit

Several communal rooms have a keep fit class which has been set up through South Cambridgeshire District Council.

These include Harston and Stevens Close Cottenham. As these are relatively new classes, there will be more about them in the next newsletter.

Watch this space.



Good news!

A new officer to help keep your homes warm

We have appointed a Warm Homes Officer, Elaine Butterworth, who will work with the warm Homes Strategy to bring more initiatives to you, such as external & internal insulation, and different heating systems such as air source heating, and solar and PV panels. We think a dedicated officer will make sure the work is progressed to the benefit of as many tenants as possible.



<<< NEWSFLASH >>>









But it may not be the best deal for tenants

You may see some advertisements about the Government's new initiative the "Green Deal" which permits loans for energy saving improvements to your home such as loft insulation, internal and external wall insulation, new boilers, double glazing and solar panels etc.

As a tenant, before you can have any Green Deal improvements carried out on your home, you must seek permission from us as your landlord.

However, we are currently refusing permission because we will gradually be carrying out many of the improvements as part of our Warm Homes Strategy at no cost to you.

Other factors influencing our decision to refuse permission for Green Deal measures are:

-  Although the improvement work is intended to enable people to make energy savings, the energy savings will be used to pay back the loan and will be added onto your electricity bill which means your energy bills will not be reduced.
-  The interest rates on the loan are much higher than average high street loans.
-  Failure to repay the weekly amount on your Green Deal loan may result in disconnection of your electricity supply.
-  Should you move out of your home, the outstanding payments on the loan will be transferred to the new tenant and their circumstances could result in them not being able to pay the loan.
-  It is also likely you will incur an initial cost of around £150 to get a Green Deal Assessment carried out which is required to agree the level of suitable improvements.
-  You may be offered a cash incentive to take up the offer, but this will not cover the cost of the Green Deal Improvements

For Further information please contact Elaine Butterworth, Warm Homes Project Manager.

READ THIS if you have newly installed PV Panels

Since solar PV roof panels have been installed on over 900 of our homes to generate free electricity for tenants, we have become aware that some energy suppliers have been less than helpful where they still have old style analogue meters which run backwards when the solar panels generate.

These meters are the responsibility of the energy suppliers and they have an obligation to replace them with digital meters that don't run backwards. The difficulty has arisen when the energy suppliers have

changed the meters and then 'estimated' the usage whilst the panels were generating and in some cases the estimated bills have been very high. We have successfully challenged some high bills, and revised bills have been sent which are substantially lower.

If you feel you have been overcharged by your supplier please contact them in the first instance and ask them how they estimated the bill. If you require any assistance please contact us on: 03450 450 500.

The Annual Report for Tenants & Leaseholders 2012

You responded to our survey and said:

Length of report? **75%** of you said it was about right

Language clear & understandable? **89%** of you told us it was clear & understandable

To save money would you like the council to publish the Annual report on our website rather than post the report to every tenant and leaseholder?

80% of you said no – please post me a copy every year

What is the most interesting part of the report to you? (you could vote for none, one or all of the categories)

46% of you thought
ENERGY EFFICIENCY

67% of you thought
REPAIRS

24% of you thought
MONEY

16% of you thought
Tenant Groups

30% of you thought
WELFARE & TENANCY CHANGES

44% thought
PLANS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

What topics would you like more information on?

- Neighbourhood support & ASB – 106 of you wanted this (20%) ●
 - New Council Homes – 126 wanted this (24%) ●
- Repairs – 304 wanted more info here (59%) ●
 - Emergency & Day to Day – 159 wanted more info here (31%) ●
- Planned/ Cyclical – 139 of you wanted this (27%) ●
 - Landscaping – 74 of you were interested here (14%) ●
- Changes in Welfare Benefit – 150 of you wanted this (29%) ●
 - Sheltered Housing – 125 wanted this (24%) ●
- Tenant Groups – 61 wanted more info here (12%) ●

Everything you tell us through surveys such as this are taken into account when we come to write the next report.

RENTS

Tenants often ask us why their rents go up each year?

To answer this:

Like everyone the council is not immune from rising prices. It is recognised by central government that to ensure the maintenance and improvement of our homes over time as costs go up, rents should increase to at least keep pace with these rising prices and bring our rents in line with other social housing rents which are often higher.

The Government formula that we apply to your rent increase is:




RPI (Retail Price Index) + 0.5%
(plus £2 if the rent needs to be brought in line with target rents)

What are target rents?

Target rents are rents based on a national formula which takes into account elements such as the value of the property, local earnings against national earnings, number of bedrooms etc to try to ensure that all social housing tenants pay the similar rents per week for similar properties. We are bringing our rents in line with target rents and the government formula allows us to do this incrementally over a number of years to mitigate the impact on our tenants. The additional £2 will not be levied if your rent has already reached target rent.

Who decides about our rent increase?

As a council we are run by the 57 elected Councillors who represent the wards that make up South Cambridgeshire District. The councillors make the final decision on your rent increase based upon information they receive from the Housing Department that covers information such as:

-  30 year business plan
-  5 year housing maintenance plan
-  Budget projections

What do we do with the money we collect?

Amongst other things we use it to provide you with emergency repairs, repairs, cyclical and planned maintenance, landscaping services, neighbourhood support, help to move, the ability to be involved in your housing service, sheltered housing services, and the building of new council homes from any investment surplus.

What would happen if rents did not increase?

Over time the service you receive would suffer. We might need to restrict repairs and maintenance to just essential works, reduce staff numbers and not be able to respond effectively to changes in the law and benefit rules.

For any queries you might have about your rent and financial situation please call one of the numbers below and speak to an advisor:

Housing Issues: 03450 450 051

Benefit Issues: 03450 450 061

Rent and Council Tax Issues: 03450 450 064



How To Pay Your Rent

Please see below information which sets out a summary of the different methods available for you to make rent payments and how to access these.

Please note this council no longer accepts payments by cash or cheque. (In exceptional circumstances nominated members of staff may be authorised to receive a cash or cheque payment).

Rent is due weekly and can be paid either weekly, fortnightly or calendar monthly provided payments are made in advance.

■ **Direct Debit** – Can be paid on the 1st or 15th of each month. Phone 03450 450064 to request a form for setting up this method of payment.

■ **Telephone Payment** – If you have a Debit or Credit card you can pay over the telephone by calling 03450 455218. This line is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. PLEASE NOTE: There is a 2.5% charge for Credit Card payments.

■ **On-Line Payment** – You can pay on-line using your Debit or Credit card by visiting www.scambs.gov.uk/paymybill

■ **Post Office/Paypoint** – You will need a plastic payment card to use this payment method. Payments will take up to 3 working days to reach us. Please contact us on 03450 450064 to order a card which should reach you within 5 working days.

■ **Personal Payment** – Payments can be made at the offices of Cambridge City Council, Mandela House, Regent Street, Cambridge. Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 5.00pm and Fridays 9.00am to 4.30pm.

■ **Standing Order** – Please ensure you quote your 13 digit tenancy reference number when setting up a Standing Order with your bank to pay the rent. If you wish to check this reference please phone 03450 450 064. The bank details you will require are:

Sort Code: 40-16-57

Account Number: 11180045

Account Name: SCDC Collection Account

Bank: HSBC
62 Hills Road
Cambridge

Enquiries about rent payments can be made by telephone 03450 450 064 or by email to: rents@scambs.gov.uk

If you are on a low income, you may be able to get help with your rent and council tax payments even if you are in full time work.

To find out more and request a claim form please contact us on 03450 450 061.

Change In Your Circumstances?

- You get married or enter into a civil partnership
- You have a child
- You get divorced or annulled civil partnership
- Your partner moves in
- Your partner moves out
- A member of your household dies
- A member of your household moves away
- A member of your household returns
- Acquire a pet
- You undergo gender reassignment
- You stop work
- You start work
- You retire

Always Let Your Housing Officer (& Benefit Department If Relevant) Know When:

- You become registered disabled
- You take in a lodger
- Breakdown in your relationship

Why do we need the information from you?

It helps us to:

- Provide services direct to you
- Give accurate communication from us to you
- Target advice to you better
- Advise you if your benefit entitlement might be affected by changes
- Resolve tenancy issues more easily

Welfare Reform

Summary of main Changes February 2013

Universal Credit (UC) is the single most important Welfare Reform in a generation.

UC is designed to simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment that is flexible to accommodate personal circumstances, simple to access and administer and ensures that people are better off in work. UC will merge out-of-work benefits and in-work support.

People over pension credit age are largely unaffected by the current Welfare Reform proposals.

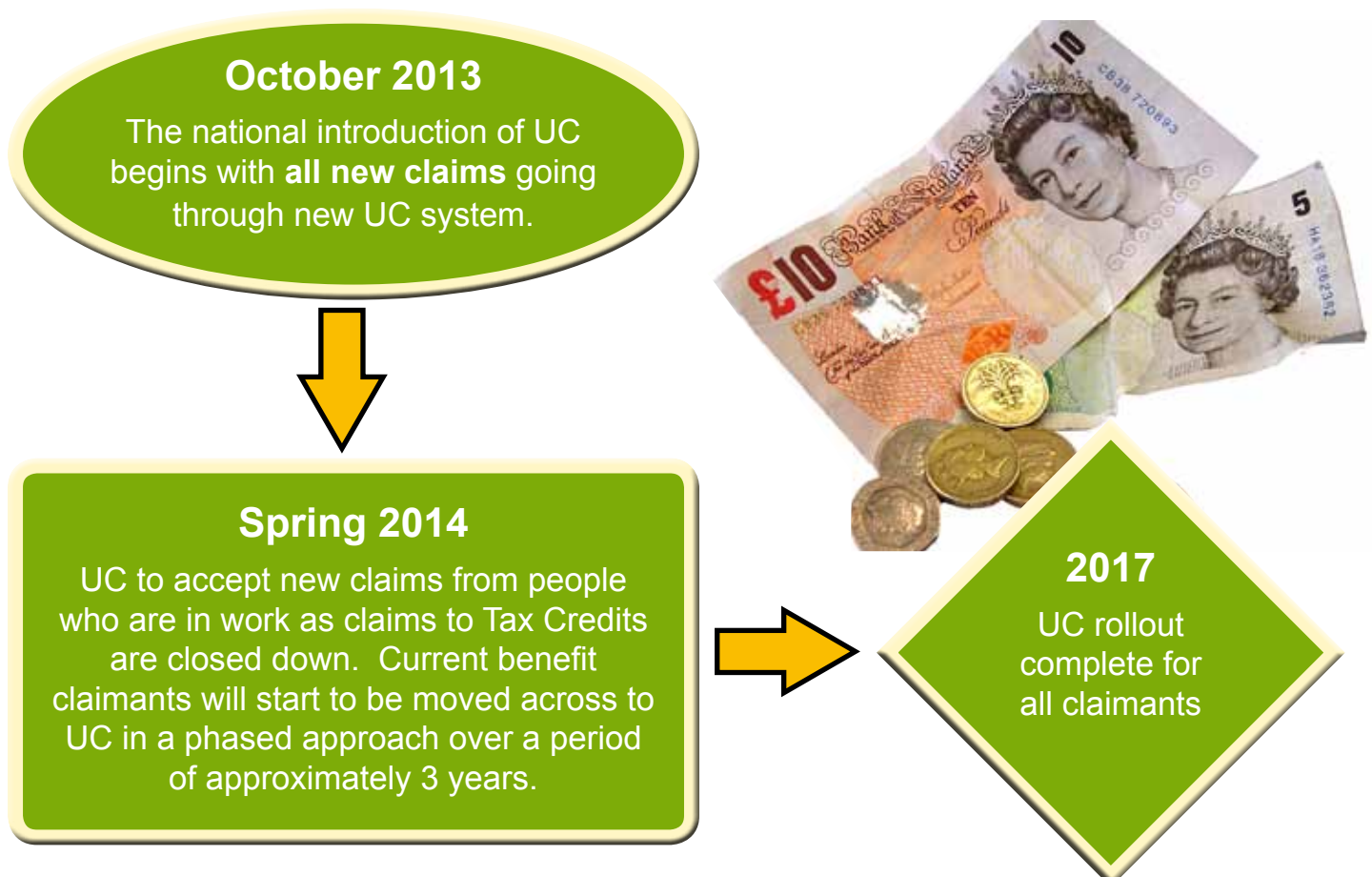
UC applies to those of working age and will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and care.

Universal Credit will replace:

- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

In the majority of cases UC will be paid direct to the customer and will be paid monthly in arrears.

UC Current Plans:



You'll have heard of the "Welfare Reforms" but what are they?

Changes affecting lone parents

From August 2012 the Income Support legislation changed and lone parents' are expected to work or seek work once their youngest child reaches 5 years old.

Council Tax (CT)

CT Benefit will cease to exist from **31/03/2013** and will be replaced by **Localised Council Tax Support**. Every Local Authority (LA) is required to design and adopt a scheme based on a national framework.

SCDC proposed scheme will protect lone parents with children under 5 and those who receive certain disability benefits and carers.

All other working age claimants will have an 8.5% cut in Council Tax support and therefore will need to start paying 8.5% of their total CT liability from 1st April 2013.

Benefits Cap

From **September 2013** weekly limits will be introduced for the total amount of benefit that can be paid to a claimant. The cap will be applied to the combined income from:

Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Employment Support Assistance (except where the support element is paid) Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit (from October 2013), other benefits such as Carers Allowance and Maternity Allowance.

The Cap is **£350** per week for single adults. **£500** per week for couples (with or without dependent children), and lone parents with dependent children.

The cap will not apply where someone in the household works or obtains work and is entitled to Working Tax Credit or receives War Widows pension, Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance

Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

From **October 2013** PIP's will replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people of working age (aged 16 – 64 on the day PIP is introduced).

From **October 2013** reassessments will commence for people on DLA who are reporting a change of circumstances. The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) will also start to contact those reaching the end of their fixed term awards and young people approaching 16.

From **October 2015** remaining claimants on DLA will be invited to claim PIP.

People under 16 or over 65 can continue to claim Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.

The majority of these changes only affect people of working age and further details can be found from SCDC or DWP websites, or call the Revenue and Benefit team at South Cambridgeshire District Council on 03450 450 061

South Cambridgeshire District Council and Under-occupation

Why are the changes coming?

The Chancellor announced the Government's plans to restrict Housing Benefit for under-occupying, working age Local Authority and Housing Association tenants in the June 2010 budget. This led to the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and later in 2012 the Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations which allow for changes to come in on 1st April 2013.

No Councils have a choice in this

What are the changes?

These new regulations introduce size criteria into calculations for those in receipt of Housing Benefit in the social rented sector.

Under the new system from April 2013 one bedroom is allowed for:

- Each person or couple aged over 16
- Up to two children of the same sex aged under 16
- Up to two children of the opposite sex aged under 10

Where under-occupation exists the total eligible rent for Housing Benefit will be reduced by:

- 14% in the case of 1 excess bedroom
- 25% in the case of 2 or more excess bedrooms

Where someone is disabled and has a non-resident (someone who does not usually live at the property) carer who stays overnight on a regular basis an additional room can be allowed for. There is also a concession for registered foster carers and for adult children in the armed forces if they have no other permanent address.

What has South Cambridgeshire District Council done to help its tenants?

Since early in 2012 SCDC has been planning for these changes to help lessen the impact on customers as much as possible. Set out below is a summary of the work we have done so far:

Checked through our databases of information held on current HB claimants to identify working age households who are potentially under-occupying

August 2012

Wrote to all households potentially under-occupying and in receipt of HB explaining the changes due in April 2013 and how it could impact on their household.

Wrote to and invited all households potentially under-occupying to tenant led open days in Impington, Sawston and Melbourn during September and October 2012.

We sent out questionnaires to all households potentially under-occupying to be returned to South Cambs for verification.

Carried out over 300 home visits to potentially under-occupying households

Developed an Under-Occupation questionnaire to go through during home visits or phone interviews in order to confirm household circumstances and talk through possible help and support available to those affected.

Over the past few months Housing and Benefits staff have been working hard reviewing and analysing information systems and communicating with tenants to provide information and support to those affected by these changes. This work will be strengthened by the recent appointment of an Under-occupation Officer - Peter Moston based at Cambourne who will provide advice and support to help with these changes.

Of the 400 or so households affected by the changes there are currently 60 households who have said to us they wish to be considered for a move to a smaller property (57 within South Cambs and 3 outside area).

As a result of early communication with residents in some cases we have been able to move people to smaller properties or provided advice on mutual exchanges and moving outside the area. In total to March 2013 we have helped 37 households make changes to help avoid the impact of the new legislation and Housing Benefit restrictions

How can we help you?

Under-occupation Interviews have focused on:

- Confirming household details and the financial impact of changes.
- Confirming rent payment responsibility after 1st April 2013 and whether residents need help to open a bank account.
- Asking if households are interested in moving to a smaller property and what the options may be for this including help registering with Home-Link or advice on advertising/searching for a mutual exchange.
- Discussing the option of taking in a lodger including signposting people to King Street Housing Society who operate an approved lodger scheme for finding suitable lodgers. This service includes practical advice and support to help ensure you are placed with the most appropriate lodger which includes doing a thorough risk assessment and reference checks of prospective lodgers.
- Looking at options of supporting residents to find work by identifying current difficulties experienced for example no local childcare provision/support or lack of public transport to get to work.
- Discussing work skills development and training needs to see if support is needed with this for example preparing CV's and developing interview techniques. We have established links with a local Housing Association who can look at arranging 1:1 support in this area for some residents.
- Interest in voluntary work.
- Interest in getting involved in the Council's Tenant Led Scrutiny function which can also provide training, support and mentoring enabling people to gain additional skills which can assist in finding employment.

We have employed extra staff for a three month period to deal with calls about the changes to welfare benefits including the under occupation changes. Call us with your questions, and there will be someone on the line to help. See over page for useful contacts.

For further information and support please see contact and information details below:

For general advice and information on housing and other services and more information on welfare reform

www.scambs.gov.uk or phone 03450 450 500.

For housing benefit and council tax advice

benefits@scambs.gov.uk or by phone on 03450 450 061
8.00am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday.

The Citizens Advice Service provide a wide range of confidential advice - for further details go to
www.cambridgecab.org.uk or phone 08448 487979

You may also find the Money Advice Service useful, which offers free, unbiased financial advice and money health checks that can be completed online helping you to make the most of your money.

Further information can be found at www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

HOUSING SURGERIES

For your questions and concerns, come and see your housing officer at the local regular surgeries.

Willingham

- April 3rd
- May 1st
- June 5th

1st Wednesday of the month.

Held 10.00 - 12:00

At Willingham Tabernacle
Baptist Church
George Street
Willingham
Cambs
CB24 5LJ.

Gamlingay

- April 17th
- May 8th
- June 12th
- July 17th
- September 18th

Held 10.00 - 12:00

At Avenells Way
Communal Room
Avenells Way
Gamlingay
Sandy
SG19 3EQ

Sawston

- April 4th & 18th
- May 2nd, 16th & 30th
- June 13th & 27th

Held 10am - 1pm

Chaplefield Way
communal room,
Chaplefield Way
Sawston
Cambridge
CB22 3SY

Come and watch democracy in action!

The next Housing Portfolio Holder Meeting is on June 19th - 5.30pm at the Council offices.

Decisions affecting your housing service are made at these meetings and agendas and background papers can be found on our website, or on request.

New Complaints Process For Housing

You may not know this – but if you have a complaint about our housing service you would put it through the council general complaints process and if you were not satisfied with the Stage 1 and Stage 2 of that process you could ask the Local Government Ombudsman to judge your complaint.



In line with recent Government legislation around localism, that focusses on the principle of – adding a new level of resolution for complaints by social tenants against their landlords -we are introducing a housing complaints system that follows this legislation and changes the process to:

You have a complaint and put it in writing to the Housing Department.

Stage 1 - complaint is investigated by the council - decision made head of service

If you are not happy ask for Stage 2

Stage 2 - complaint is re investigated by the council - decision made by director of housing

If you are still not happy you can now refer your complaint on to a “designated person” who could be either:

Stage 3

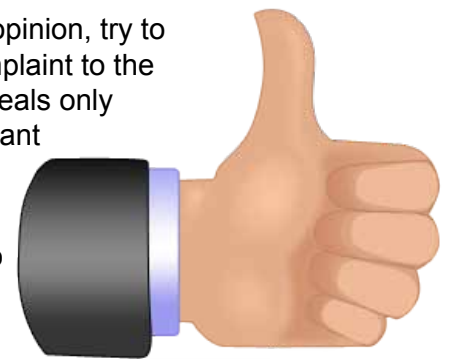
- An MP
- A local District Councillor
- A designated tenant panel

Stage 4

This designated person will review your complaint, offer advice and opinion, try to work with all parties to resolve the complaint, and can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for final decision. The Housing Ombudsman deals only in housing complaints and has a great deal of experience with all tenant

issues.

Alternatively you can skip the designated person Stage 3 and go directly to the Housing Ombudsman -you must wait 8 weeks from the end of stage 2 to your referral to the Housing Ombudsman.



Who will be on the Designated Tenant Panel?

Well to be honest that is up to you. We are seeking your views on whether:

- a) You think a tenant panel to give opinion on tenant and leaseholder complaints is a good idea?
- b) If you do - would you be interested in being a part of that panel?

What next?

Please fill out the survey and return to us, phone your opinion through to us, email us letting us know what you think or complete the online survey on our website at XXXXXXXXXXXX

OR

Let us know if you are interested in being involved in the complaints panel - and we will get a group of you together and start to talk to you about training, terms of reference, confidentiality and such like.

Are we looking for tenants with particular skills?

No not really - the essential criteria is being willing to learn, and to be able to take in different opinions and perspectives and form a balanced team view. We will help with training, transport and venues amongst other things

Fancy having a bigger say?

“What they need is tenants running things, and then things would be better.”

“It’s ridiculous what they spend our money on, why don’t they at least ask us?”

“Why have they decided to do that? That’s what I’d like to know”

Sound familiar?

We want to give you the opportunity to change your Housing Service by setting up a tenant-led scrutiny function.

What that looks like will be up to you, but scrutiny all is about giving tenants a bigger say, to effectively challenge the Council and hold it more accountable over decisions, performance and service delivery.

We realise that tenants will want support and training to develop their scrutiny function so we have engaged The Linchpin Project - an independent, tenant-led, Community Interest Company based in Cambridge to provide this over the next 12-18 months. Linchpin was launched in February 2012 and has gone on to establish a track record and reputation for providing quality training, facilitation and scrutiny mentoring services in the Eastern region www.linchpinproject.co.uk



Linchpin’s Andy Sage and Luisa Sartini-Baldwin have already delivered a Scrutiny Away Day Event and two training sessions for members of the TPG and are in the process of developing a detailed training programme based on a skills audit completed by the TPG. The training programme could include:

- Tenant scrutiny
- IT skills
- Appropriate challenge and asking questions
- Negotiation and influencing skills
- Equality and diversity
- Presentation and public speaking skills
- Report writing skills
- Meeting and committee skills
- Performance management.

These subjects are useful to anyone who wants to get more involved in their community, but they can also provide “transferable skills” that are helpful in other walks of life including getting into work or gaining promotion.

So if you are interested in what we are trying to do, in the training Linchpin is providing and want to have your say we would encourage you to give us a call for an informal chat.

Please contact Gill Anderton on 01954 713377 or Helen Pagram on 01954 713295.

Make sure your voice is heard!

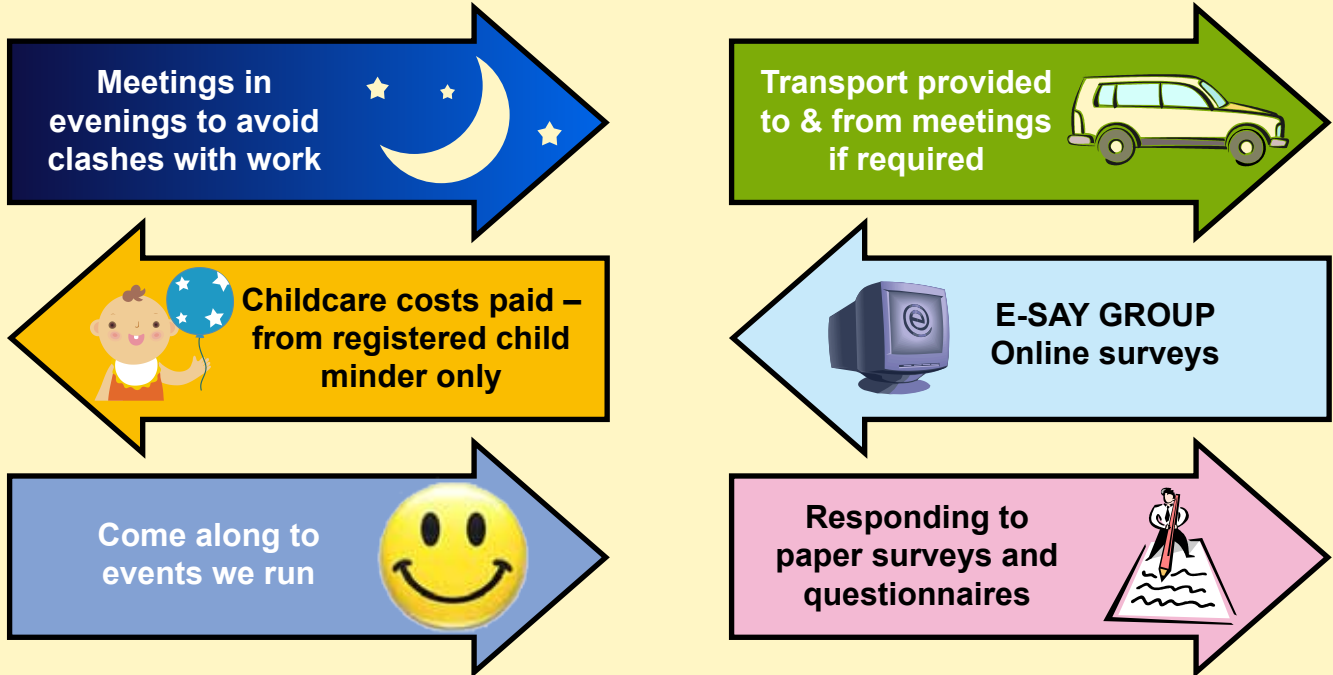
Good news!

Rehousing for a new start

A mother, whose son shared her 3 bedroomed council home, recently died unexpectedly, leaving the son bereaved and worried about the future as he had always lived with his mum. We were able to rehouse him in another property, freeing up the 3 bed house for a family. His girlfriend promised his mum she would look after him, and they are now making a new life together in the new home. He is very grateful for the new start we have been able to give him.

Need help getting involved ?

Some ways we try to make it easier ...



Your new neighbourhood support team in action

You told us in 2010 and 2011 via surveys that you were concerned about anti-social behaviour (ASB), and as a result of the changes to the way we are financed we were able to recruit two Neighbourhood Support Officers to focus on this area of concern

The new team of two are Sherri Lee and Claire Whiteman.

We will tell you more about them and what they do in the next issue of the newsletter, but to give you a flavour here are comments from a tenant who was recently helped by the team:

"I'd just like to say that Sherri Lee was very good, listened to everything I told her, and dealt with it so well that I have no more hassle from my neighbours whatsoever. Being disabled sometimes you feel that you are talking but no-one's listening or taking it seriously. In this case I feel that my complaint was dealt with in a very professional way"



Sherri Lee



Claire Whiteman

Good news!

Making a positive change

A couple who had been tenants with us for a while reported that one of them now had a severe mobility problem. We arranged a transfer to a more suitable property more adapted to their needs and where they felt safe and they told us that the move had changed their lives for the better.

Meet & Greet - Your resident involvement team

Who are they?



Gill Anderton
Resident Involvement Team
Leader
01954 713377
gill.anderton@scambs.gov.uk



Helen Pagram
Resident Involvement Officer
01954 713295
helen.pagram@scambs.gov.uk

What's their background?

Gill has worked in housing since 1985, in Bolton, London and now Cambridgeshire. She has been a homeless persons officer, a development officer and manager, and a sustainability manager; mainly for Housing Associations. She has worked with residents on estate regeneration projects, planning projects and community projects and brings this experience to her work with the council. Gill believes strongly that informing and communicating with tenants and leaseholders leading to their greater involvement can only improve the housing service.

Helen has worked 24 years in local government and although new to Resident Involvement, she has a wealth of knowledge and experience in social housing. Helen has worked as a disabled adaptations admin assistant, contracts clerk and project manager for housing maintenance, both planned and responsive. Helen has a passion for achieving the best possible solutions for our tenants and is always happy to help.

What do they do?

The Resident Involvement Team is responsible for the increasing and supporting the involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the quality of their housing service.

Some of the things they do include:

- Work with tenants to create the Annual Report for Tenants & Leaseholders
- Work with tenants to create the Tenant newsletters
- Publicise and support the Tenant Participation Group work
- Publicise and support the Disability Forum work
- Survey tenants for their priorities
- Run events for tenants & leaseholders such as Open Days
- Run and facilitate tenant training
- Creation of tenant friendly policies
- Ensure tenant representation on maintenance contractor meetings and contract procurement
- Increase the number of involved tenants
- Support a tenant led scrutiny function
- Gathering & publicising of performance information
- Support a tenant editorial panel
- Support Village Voices
- Support resident groups

Good news!

Buying into a village dream

A longstanding village resident wanted to remain living in that village as they grew older and we have been able to help them buy into a shared equity sheltered bungalow in that village giving them the security they dreamed of.

Helping tenants back into work

As part of a corporate group, housing staff have been looking at what the barriers to employment are within the district and what help we can offer residents to find work.

In particular we were interested to know what help we could offer our tenants who will be affected by the changes in housing benefit. We surveyed those affected

Out of 120 tenants surveyed :

- 13% said they were actively looking for work
- 9% not wishing to answer the question
- 78% saying work was not an option, with the main reason stated as ill health or disability.

Of those not looking for work 39% of tenants did not give a reason, but we hope that with some help and support we can offer our tenants a real step into work.

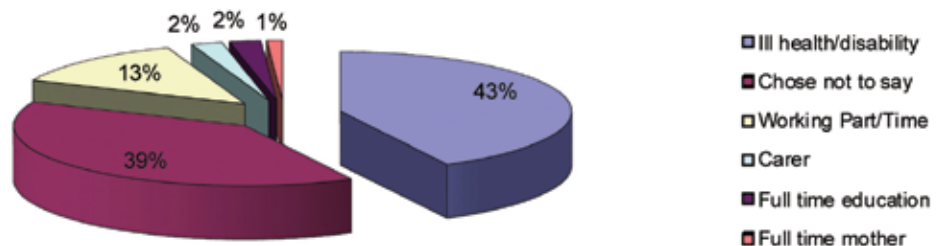
We have teamed up with the Cambridge Housing Society (CHS) Employment Advice Outreach Service.

This scheme offers free employment; training and volunteering advice to anyone aged 19+ through a tailored 121 session, with some priority groups entitled to have up to 3 sessions.

So, if you're looking for work or a change, thinking of training or retraining, or want to improve your skills, CHS has a FREE helpful and friendly advice service to help you plan what to do next. If you want to know more about this, please contact the Council for a referral to the service – telephone Julie Fletcher on 01954 713352.

We are also working with Job Centre Plus to produce an information pack detailing the many support agencies working in the district that offer help and advice in finding employment, such as local job clubs, training programmes, etc. This will be developed through our new website offering an information gateway to help find employment.

Reasons for not looking for work
(as identified through the SDC tenant survey)



National Apprenticeship Week March 2013

In recognition of the National Apprenticeships Week in 2013 the Council is also embarking on an apprenticeship scheme with Cambridge Regional College.

Housing are taking the lead to launch the scheme; with one apprentice joining the Housing Team in April, and a second apprenticeship being advertised. If apprenticeships is something you would be interested in please contact CRC on 01223 418778 or email training@camre.ac.uk or visit their website at <http://www.camre.ac.uk/Apprenticeships/>



Repair Advice

If you need to report a repair on your property call Mears on 0800 085 1313.

Mears will arrange a day and time to come to you and make the repair.

Mears aim to fix first time round.

MEARS

Making People *Smile*

Carbon Monoxide Risks

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless, tasteless, poisonous gas produced by incomplete burning of carbon-based fuels, including gas, oil, wood and coal. Carbon-based fuels are safe to use. It is only when the fuel does not burn properly that excess CO is produced, which is poisonous. When CO enters the body, it prevents the blood from bringing oxygen to cells, tissues, and organs.

You can't see it, taste it or smell it but CO can kill quickly without warning.

Warning Signs

You can tell if your gas appliance is working correctly by observing the flame. A healthy flame should be crisp and a vibrant blue. A yellow/orange flame is evidence of possible carbon monoxide.

Other danger signs to watch out for are:

- Sooty stains on or just above appliances
- Coal or wood fires that burn slowly or go out
- Heavy condensation in the room where the appliance is installed

You are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if:

- Your appliance is not working properly
- A safety check or annual service has not been carried out on your appliance
- There is not enough fresh air in the room
- The chimney or flue is blocked

It is dangerous to block a gas appliance's air vents. Blocking ventilation or misusing your appliance (i.e. using a cooker as a heating appliance) can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.

There are a number of simple steps that gas consumers can take to keep themselves safe.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

Early systems of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can mimic many common ailments and can be easily be confused with food poisoning, viral infections, flu or simple tiredness.

Symptoms to look out for:

- Headaches/dizziness
- Tiredness
- Visual problems
- Breathlessness
- Pains in the chest or stomach
- Nausea
- Loss of consciousness
- Erratic behaviour

If you or your family experience any of the symptoms and believe you may have been exposed to carbon monoxide, you should seek urgent medical advice from your GP or an A&E department.

If you suspect carbon monoxide

- Switch off the appliance and shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve
- Open all doors windows to ventilate the property
- If you are a council tenant – Call your landlord South Cambridgeshire District Council on 0800 085 1313
- If you are not a tenant call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999
- Visit your GP and tell him/her that you believe you may have been exposed to carbon monoxide



The new Visiting Support Service for Sheltered Housing

Since it started in July 2012 the Visiting Support Service is proving to be a very significant and valuable service to sheltered housing residents throughout the district.

The service is flexible and person centred placing residents in the driving seat when it comes to their support.

The service can be accessed by all sheltered housing residents through a referral process.

A referral can be made personally, through a Sheltered Estate Officer who residents are familiar with, a family member, a GP, or any other agency, either Social Services, or the Mental Health team as an example.

We have 8 Visiting Support Officers (VSO's) who cover the district - they are:

- Wendy Woodbridge, Debbie George and Tina Blee who cover the North area of the District.
- Alison Spence, Tracy Hill and Tina Brown cover the East area of the District.
- Lesley Aldridge and Juliette Wilson-Bond cover the West area of the District.

We are recruiting a ninth officer in Spring 2013

All the VSO's pride themselves in delivering a comprehensive and tailored service to each of the residents they support.

There are a number of reasons why a resident may need support, it could range from sourcing new furnishings/white goods, support a new residents with moving in, advice with payment of bills, benefits advice and application, debt advice, social integration, and accessing other services.

Following are examples of the work that's achieved by the Visiting support service;

■ Mrs X. was referred to the service as needing support. The visiting support officer conducted an assessment which identified that Mrs X was struggling financially because she wasn't receiving any of the benefits she was entitled to. The VSO worked closely with Mrs X. and all the appropriate benefits agencies and Mrs X. is now in receipt of all her entitlements. She is now able to pay her bills and buy food.

Mrs X's car failed it's MOT and had to be scrapped. The VSO made contact with the DVLA and found out that Mrs X was entitled to a mobility car. The VSO completed all the necessary paperwork with Mrs X. for a mobility car and arranged for Mrs X's old car to be scrapped. Mrs X was able to select and collect a new mobility car with the help of the VSO. Mrs X. was thrilled with the outcome and said;

"My support officer has changed my life; I was going without food or heating. Because of the support and help I received I now don't need to worry about money. My support officer helped me get a new car through the Mobility Scheme and I can now live independently."

This is just one of the successes the visiting support service is having in helping residents live independently in their own homes for as long as they are able.



Team Leader - Visiting Support, Sandra Vandort-Murphy

As a result of a decision by Cambridgeshire County Council the Visiting Support Service is being tendered out during the middle of this year with a view to starting the new Supporting People contract in January 2014. The tender will go out nationally to any appropriate company that wishes to bid.

We need to ensure that we are in the best position to bid for the Supporting People contract so that we can continue to work with sheltered housing residents enabling them to maintain a successful tenancy, maximise their independence and support their health and well-being.

As we have already restructured the service we feel better prepared for the tender process and we will work hard to secure the contract.

Housing Open Days Raffle winners

We ran a free raffle for tenants & leaseholders who came along to our Autumn 2012 Housing Open Days.



One of our Prize winners from Dry Drayton on winning the microwave told us:

"Well what can I say but thank you. I wasn't going to attend the open days, but my neighbour mentioned it so I went along and found out a lot of information and also entered the raffle. I am so thrilled to be a winner as I never win anything. Thank you so much.

I love my little bungalow in which I have been in two years now; I live in a lovely area. I am so happy."

A tenant from Sawston who won the DAB Radio said they were:

"thrilled with the prize, as well as getting good advice and results on problems as a direct result of coming to the Open Day"

A tenant from Melbourn won the Xbox said:

"I was shocked that I had won, but is really pleased and and looks forward to many hours playing and watching the grandchildren play on the Xbox"

Good news!

An appointment with a winner!

Every year we are required by law to service your gas boiler to ensure its safety. All tenants who allow Morrisons in to service their boilers on the first appointment letter request are now entered into a £100 prize draw. This prize draw will be done monthly from now on and we already have our first winner! So look out for your appointment letter and act.



This Newsletter has the working title of "Tenant & Leaseholder News".



We thought you might want a chance to change the title of it to something different – a little bit catchier or more exciting perhaps?

Some years ago the previous tenant and leaseholder magazine was called "Key Issues" – you might want to return to that title?

OR you might want to send us your ideas for something new. You might get some ideas from the Annual Report 2012 that you received around Christmas 2012, or the main theme of our Housing Strategy might trigger an idea?

Whatever you think, do let us know by telling us on the enclosed survey, calling either Gill or Helen on 01954 713377 or 01954 713295 respectively, or email us on firstname.surname@scams.gov.uk or drop us a line at the offices in Cambourne.

A Tenants View: Difficult And Interesting Times Ahead

By Peter Abrahams from Histon

"The changes that have come to housing and sheltered housing have been difficult and the benefit changes in April (that are covered elsewhere in this publication) are not going to improve matters.

The 'Bedroom tax' (under occupation) is a new development which in my view is another ill thought out policy by this present government. If a person who lives let's say in Histon is over occupied under the new rules and agrees to move to a smaller house; the council who have a very limited number of 1 bed properties may offer something, but for example it is in Gamlingay. What use is that when they have lived in Histon all their life there, and have all their family and support there? These are just a couple of the real flaws as far as I can see. You can move but there are not necessarily enough properties for that to happen. You could take in a lodger but that could affect your benefits and your 25% reduction off your council tax if you were a single person would go. I would urge you to read all the information on the changes that are out there, and contact the council's new under occupation officer for more advice.

Regarding the changes to the Sheltered Housing service. I was on the task and finish group for those changes. This group comprised elected Councillors', tenants & leaseholders and was supported by officers and its aim was to try to keep a good service despite large cuts in funding. The changes were brought about by the change in Supporting People funding and were nothing to do with the council but rather the ring fence was taken off Supporting People funding by the government and they reduced it 11% before



distributing it out to County Councils. Because the ring fence was taken off the County Council could now spend that money on any of their needs and not just Sheltered Housing. As a result by the time the money reached our council it had been reduced by 35%.

I and my fellow tenants on the committee did everything humanly possible to get more money and keep the system as it was but this was just impossible and we ended up with the best system we could from that money.

I would urge fellow tenants to get involved with the new Scrutiny directive by the government. What does this actually mean? Well it means in real terms that you can go to the council with fact based evidence and change council policy, make sure your voice is heard, and that the council are doing everything by the law and that tenants are heard and not just dictated to.

It is something that will benefit all tenants in the long term and the council is pursuing policies that are for the benefit of all not just a few; including that maintenance is carried out properly and promptly and to the highest of standards.

The council is our landlord and as tenants we have rights and now have a chance to get the council to pursue and prioritize what the tenants need.

I have enjoyed my time on the TPG. It gives an insight to what the council are doing and we have a chance to make our views known and to the credit of the council we are listened too and things have changed after it. We obviously look at the issues from a tenant's point of view but need to understand the financial constraints put on the council in the current conditions.

If you think this is something that would interest you I would urge you as a tenant interested in fairness and doing the right thing to come along and get involved."

Peter Abrahams is a tenant actively involved in working with the council to improve services. The views expressed are Peter's views alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of TPG, other tenant groups or the council.

EASY CHOCOLATE CAKE

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 25 minutes

Total Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

- 6 oz/175g sugar
- 6 oz/ 175g of either margarine or half margarine and half softened butter
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- 5 oz/ 140g self raising flour
- 1½ oz/40g cocoa
- 2 tbsp warm milk

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4

- In a large baking bowl cream the sugar with the margarine and butter until light and fluffy and very pale in colour. You can use either an electric hand whisk, wooden spoon, or fork (obviously makes it easier). the electric whisk
- Add the beaten egg a little at a time and again beat well.
- Sieve the cocoa with the flour and baking powder. Fold gently into the butter and egg mixture. Finally, add the milk and boiling water, stir well.
- Grease 2 x 7"/18cm cake tins. Divide the mixture between the two tins, and gently spread to create a smooth surface.
- Bake in the preheated oven for 20 - 25 minutes until risen. To check the cake is cooked insert a metal skewer into the centre, it should come out clean with crumbs on it, not cake mixture.
- Remove the cakes from the tins and leave to cool on a wire rack. Once cooled decorate as desired.

You can fill the cake with jam, jam and cream or a chocolate icing. The spreadable icing can also be used on the top of the cake.

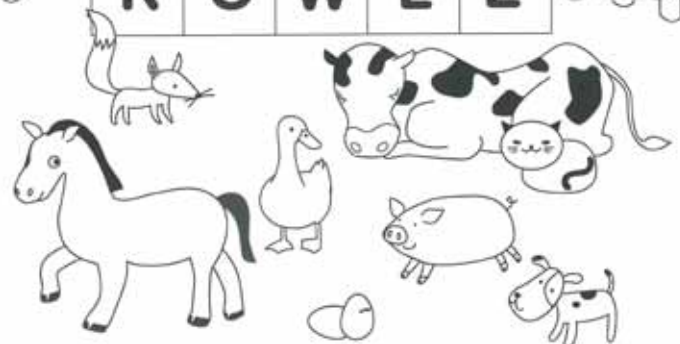
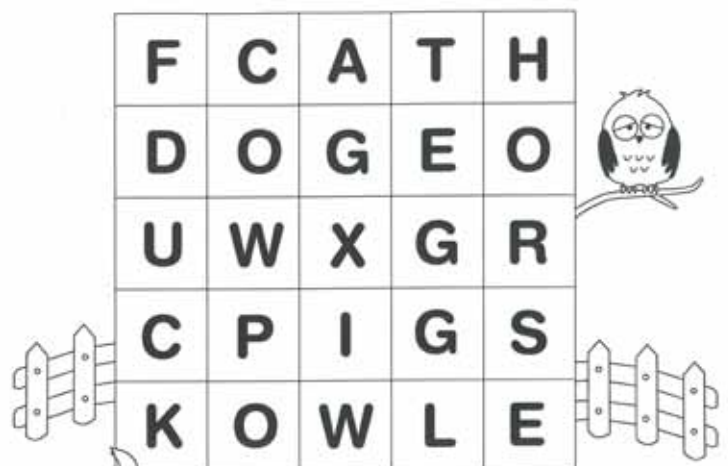
To Make Spreadable Icing

Melt 150ml of double (heavy) cream and 150g (5oz) dark, plain chocolate, broken into pieces in a large heatproof basin placed over a pan of simmering water. Once melted, stir thoroughly then leave to cool and thicken.



Childrens Puzzle

SEE WHO YOU CAN FIND IN THE FARM?



CAT DOG FOX DUCK PIG EGG HORSE OWL COW

Survey

Do You Want To See A Designated Tenant Complaint Panel Helping To Resolve Your Housing Complaints?

The Government's Localism Act 2012 makes changes to the way complaints about the housing service are dealt with.

Please read the article on this in the newsletter.

Briefly, it introduces 2 new things:

If you are not satisfied with the way the Council has dealt with a complaint you can take your complaint to a "Designated Person" who can be an MP, District Councillor or a tenant panel.

The final place you can take a complaint if still not satisfied is the Housing Ombudsman – a change from the current system using the Local Government Ombudsman.



We need to know if our tenants & leaseholders think such a tenant complaint panel is a good idea. We would appreciate you completing this survey and returning it to us in the SAE provided.

1. Do you agree that a designated tenant complaint panel is a good idea?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2. South Cambs District Council supports the idea and will provide training and support. Would you see this as useful?

- Yes
- No

3. If you think a panel is a good idea, would you be interested in being a member of such a tenant complaint panel?

- Yes
- No

4. Please leave your contact details for us here and we will be in touch with you:

.....

.....

5. If you do not want to see a tenant complaint panel, is it because you think:

- Tenants should not see details about other tenants
- Tenants might be less impartial
- Tenants would need significant training
- Another reason - please state

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

And Finally

What would you like this newsletter to be called?

