

Autumn 2018

The magazine from Central Bedfordshire Council
for our tenants and leaseholders

Central
Bedfordshire

Housing Matters

great
services

Teddy Bears' Picnic

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Introduction

from Carol Rooker Head of Housing Operations



I am delighted to be able to contribute to this edition of **Housing Matters**, especially after the brilliant summer we experienced. It made everyone feel more positive, and coupled with the World Cup excitement, it was a great summer!

The Housing Service has also been busy and upbeat, starting in April when we introduced a new service for those faced with homelessness. The focus is on preventing homelessness, an objective that we all support, as if we are contacted early enough, we may be able to intervene and prevent someone losing their home.

Some of the actions that we have taken to deliver this new service include:

- Introduced new IT systems to manage cases more closely
- Acquired a number of properties across the area
- Built new properties in Biggleswade
- Provided more accommodation for use on a short term urgent basis
- Set up a new Lettings Service - to support people into private rented accommodation
- Taken on a number of new staff - including apprentices
- Working closer with others to provide more housing options: for example young people
- Launched a new tenant app - so you can contact us at a time that suits you. Over 600 people have signed up for it!

Other more general plans underway include:

- Setting up a new contract for our repairs service with a long-term partner
- Seeking a contractor to build our new Independent Living Scheme in Houghton Regis
- Building a new Gypsy and Traveller site in the Biggleswade area
- Securing a new contract for dealing with our community alarm
- Reviewing our approach to involving and informing you in the Housing Service
- Reviewing our approach to helping people to "move on" from their current home
- Exploring ways to maximise options to build more properties for those in housing need

We are also reviewing the contents of a new Government Green Paper on housing, which although planned for the spring has now just been published. It includes more emphasis on regulating housing providers, especially in terms of health and safety (this follows the Grenfell fire last year), and improving complaints processes for early resolution of issues. We have ensured that a link to this Green Paper has been added to our website, and will update you in future editions of **Housing Matters** of any changes that we have to make.

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/housing/policies/overview.aspx

Carol Rooker

Head of Housing Operations

How paying by Direct Debit really makes a difference to customers



We often advertise Direct Debit as an easy way to pay, and it is - it really is. Tracey Dunn, one of our tenant representatives, told us how her experience with direct debit helped another customer pay her bills and give peace of mind.

She said: "I visited a neighbour and friend of mine for a number of years. When she was mobile, she always walked into town and paid her rent and bills every week, but as the years went on she was unable to walk too far. Although she began taking the bus for a while, it became too much for her, and she got very worried about paying her rent and bills.

"During one of my visits, I told her about how I paid my bills via Direct Debit, and how simple it was.

With her permission, I helped her set up Direct Debits to pay her rent and bills. After the first couple of months checking her bank statements and realising that all her bills were paid on time, she was so much happier and more settled knowing her rent was paid.

"Her words to me were: 'Why didn't I do this years ago!'"

Thanks Tracey for sharing your story.

It is easy to set up a Direct Debit to pay your rent. All you need to do is call the **Housing Rents team** on **0300 300 5545** or **0300 300 5186** with your account number and sort code, and we will do the rest.

Housing that makes a difference

As a social housing provider, we come across situations where working with other services can make a big difference to someone's life, and where the type of housing can improve the occupant's quality of life.

One of our customers has recently experienced how much a change of housing can mean not just to her, but her family, and she has been kind enough to share her story.

A mother of two, our customer lived in a house that met the needs of her and her two children.

In 2004, she began losing the sight in one of her eyes, and after a failed operation to save the sight, was registered partially sighted in 2005. As the years progressed, the sight in her other eye began to fade.

Determined to carry on, she tried to continue as usual. However, she began to struggle in the house. Often, she would miss steps and fall down the stairs, and getting in and out of the bath was difficult, leaving her injured and concerned. She worried about needing to get to her children in a hurry, or falling unconscious, leaving them alone.



After seeking further support, she was diagnosed as severely sighted in 2017.

At this time, a social worker and occupational therapist were assessing her needs and discussing options to make the house safer for her and her family.

Adapting her current property wasn't feasible, so the next option was to find her a family home that was on the ground floor. Due



to her visual impairment and children being at local schools she needed to stay near where she lived, if possible. She said: *"I know the ruts and bumps and feel confident where I am. People know me around here, so if I get lost, I know someone will help me back."*

After working with her social worker and occupational therapist for some time, a property became available that suited her needs. Being reasonably close to her old home, near her bus route, and adaptable, this was ideal. The property was in need of refurbishment, which meant a bit of a wait. It was a testing time for the whole family, with the children eagerly waiting to move as much as our customer.

She said: *"It felt longer than it took - years, rather than months. However, I was involved through the process and my opinion asked on certain aspects, such as cupboard handles, which need to be a certain type to avoid catching clothing. The builders did a great job, and the council team bent over backwards to get this done."*

"The Tuesday before I moved in, I couldn't believe it. I thought it would be cancelled and when I received the call to say go ahead, I was almost in tears."

"When I moved in, it was a relief, like the whole world lifted from my shoulders. We were unpacked within two days! It feels like home. The only place I have moved into that feels perfect, with the children, everything. My family members who are disabled can come and visit too, which is a bonus! It's so much easier living here as I no longer worry about stairs and the children, and I can have a shower when I want"

Her partner added: *"I feel happier going to work knowing that she is safe."*

And the good news does not stop there. She added: *"Now I have a garden and am settled, I have started guide dog training. I have done one session, doing another session with a harness without a dog, and then I will hopefully go on a list for a dog so I can start to go out by myself more."*

When I asked if she would move again, she smiled:

"I am never, ever, ever moving again. I like it here so much. It feels like home."





Plenty of sunscreen and water at the Teddy Bears' Picnic

The New Woodfield Green and Downside Residents Association hosted a Teddy Bears' Picnic on a scorching Sunday afternoon this summer. The event was organised by the Association for the local residents, and was well attended despite the heat.

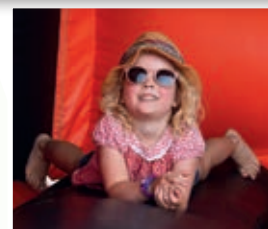
The children had a choice of two bouncy castles and an entertainer, who juggled and made balloon animals. Also present was a face-painter, who was very popular.

Refreshments were available, including water, juice and fruit, kindly donated by Asda, and many of the children were wearing the flashing ears Asda offered as a special treat. Picnics were laid out with many families and friends enjoying the glorious day, and there was a real sense of community.

"It's great for the kids," one resident said, which was a view shared by many. "It helps that it's free as not many people can afford to take their kids out."

Of course, at a teddy bears' picnic, there needs to be a teddy, and there were four, provided by committee members and Lombardo's. Each was up for grabs and four lucky children took one home following the free raffle draw.

The Association hold many events, most of which are advertised in the Downside Magazine, so if you are interested, show your support and join in.



For more information on setting up or joining a residents' association, please contact tenantinvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Make contact easier using your tenant app

You should already have heard about the tenant app, but do you know how easy it is to use?

Once you have registered, you will be able to manage your housing requirements from your phone. No more sitting on the phone - saving you time, money and giving you control.

The app is not just easy, but safe too. If you pay rent over the phone, your card number can be overheard, but your unique login on the app will keep your interaction secure and is personal to you.

So you know about the app, but what can you actually do on it? You probably know that you can report repairs, pay rent and report anti-social behaviour, but did you know that that you can also view the history of repairs on your home, or that you can terminate your tenancy?

Here are other helpful tools you can find in the app:

- amend an appointment time and/or cancel a repair
- request a heating repair and find gas emergency details
- check recent rent payments and see your balance
- request a statement and rent payment card
- apply for a Direct Debit
- request permission to make improvements to your home
- report changes to your household and change contact details
- report graffiti and fly-tipping
- add photographs to show repairs or estate issues
- follow links on how to apply for rehousing and mutual exchange
- give us feedback about the service, good or bad - your suggestions on improvement are welcomed

This app is for you, as our tenant, so give it a go and see how it can work for you.

To download the app, visit the website, search for tenants app and open 'mobile app for tenants'.



Download the Housing Tenants App

Report repairs, manage your rent, apply to move home and more...





Your parking team



The parking team in Central Bedfordshire covers all roadside parking and car parks in the area. They work hard to prevent obstruction, misuse of public facilities, and to keep our roads safer. If you would like any specific advice on parking please contact the Parking team on 0300 300 8005 or parking@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

Some questions we get asked frequently

Who are Permit Smarti and JustPark and what do they do?

Permit Smarti work with us for our on street resident parking permits while JustPark cover our off street cashless parking in our car parks. If you live within a Permit Zone, you can apply for a permit at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and searching for parking.

JustPark will donate to the Road Victim's Trust each time someone opts in to their text reminder scheme.

For more information, please contact:
parking@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

How do you check people aren't using disabled spaces fraudulently?

We take this really seriously, because it really affects genuine Blue Badge holders.

We work closely with the council's Fraud team, patrolling all areas within Central Bedfordshire. We have the powers to inspect Blue Badges, and if we believe that it is being used fraudulently we will confiscate the badge, issue a Penalty Charge Notice, and if prosecuted, the person abusing the scheme could be fined up to £1,000 and have a criminal record.

What do I do if I live where parking is restricted or in a permit area, but I need vehicle access?

You can apply for a 'dispensation' via the website. Dispensations may be used for:

- furniture removals
- building/maintenance/repair works where close proximity to the site is essential
- goods deliveries in respect of where it is reasonable to allow longer than that normally permitted by the regulations
- the hearse and chief mourners' vehicles at funeral
- the bridal and attendants' vehicles at weddings
- vehicles essential to filming operations
- other circumstances in which we may reasonably regard the requirement to be essential

There are double lines, but I just need to pop to my friend's house.

You should always check for safe places to park. It is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that they are not parked on a restriction. If you park on a restriction you may be issued a Penalty Charge Notice.

My road is always busy and cars park on both sides, sometimes causing obstructions. Is there anything I can do?

If there aren't any restrictions, in place, but you would like to request restrictions, you can do so via the Highways portal on our website www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/transport/report/highways-fault.aspx and follow the steps to make a request for road markings/permit zones.

The Police can also issue Fixed Penalty Notices of £30 for 'Unnecessary or Wilful Obstruction', but please note that they'll only deal with dangerous obstructions which are real and unnecessary to other road users, which are causing an immediate danger. They don't deal with inconsiderate parking.



Are you over 55 and would like to meet others?

If so, a group of dedicated locals in Leighton Linslade work together to provide meetings, guest speakers, coach trips and entertainment.

The Cedar Finches meet every other Monday between 1-3pm, and hold a fun raffle each time. Guests are invited to give a talk on their specialist subjects, alongside a drink and biscuit and of course a chat. For information, contact Sylvia on **07745 556741**.

The Link is another group held at the Duncombe Drive Centre in Leighton Buzzard, who meet once a month. A larger group, they include local residents and those who live further out as well. Entertainment includes musicians and singers, and involves quizzes and of course a chance to talk. The small fee is £3 if you have your own transport, and £4 if you do not. For details, contact Jo on **01525 374269**.

And if you like to go out for trips, there is an opportunity for you too. For a fee of roughly £20, you can join a coach trip to places such as Eastbourne, Clacton, Bourton-on-the-Water and Blue Water Shopping Centre. For more information on the coach trips, contact Phyllis on **01525 756873**.



Simon's Story..... sleeping on a friend's sofa to starting a degree

Some stories make us think that good things can happen, and Simon's is one of those stories. Homelessness is a big problem across the whole of the UK, and is not always defined by being on the street (a rough sleeper). In the case of Simon, circumstance, not of his making, led him to losing his home and relying on friends to keep him off the streets.

Then Simon was referred to Kilgour Court, where he was given a room, security and support to help pull his life back together.

"I was given an Independent Living Officer who helped me get back on track," he said, when asked how his support began. "My worker helped me with phone calls, helped me get a doctor, and to get in contact with the right services. I now have a doctor who has been great and really supportive, am on medication that helps and I am helped by the Community Mental Health team."

After the initial support, Simon was encouraged to think about his future. This meant attending college, where he studied and passed a course in psychology and he now has the opportunity to go to university.

"At uni, I will be studying psychology for three years. Maybe I will go for a Masters after the degree. I can't wait to get it done and move on!"

After almost three years at Kilgour, Simon is more confident around people, his self-esteem has grown, as has his confidence in decision making. He is no longer anxious and withdrawn and feels that life is worth living. His allocated

officer, Allyson, said she is very proud of his progress and determination: *"Simon's recovery has been an evolution and not a miracle, but he's slowly realised that just because he or anyone thinks he is worthless, it does not make it true. He has taken small steps, uses what he has to do what he can, and is amazing at it."*

Simon added: *"Living with others is hard sometimes, but generally works okay. I feel great after the support I've received. I still have progress to make and always will have, but it feels great to have done what I have done and I can move on and make a life for myself."*

"It has been a very long journey, and I've still got a way to go, but with all the support I've received and continue to receive, I know I will succeed in anything I set my mind to. And if I can get there, anyone can."

If you know anyone who is affected by homelessness and would like to know more, visit the council's website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and search for 'homelessness'.



An exciting new opening: Woodlands

Woodlands is the name of the new Gypsy and Traveller site that has been built near Biggleswade, and which opened in September 2018. The council currently owns and manages three Gypsy and Traveller sites across the area; Woodlands is our fourth.

The site consists of 12 pitches, with very large plots in attractive countryside.

Pitch applicants have to complete an application and supply documentation as proof of identity. Pitches are offered on housing need, in a very similar way to the housing register.

In the same way as living in a flat or house, the successful pitch applicants pay rent, which includes a service charge for communal services and repairs. Utilities and council tax are all the responsibility of each tenant.

As with the other sites, Woodlands has a site manager in place.

They are responsible for the overall management of the site, making sure that residents comply with their pitch agreement, reporting repairs and offering support and guidance. There is a national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites, so our new site is helping to address this.



For more information on the site, please go to www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and search for 'traveller sites'.

How are our repairs prioritised?

We get lots of repair requests, as you'd expect, but not everyone knows how we prioritise the repairs.

Firstly, before you report your repair, have you checked our website? The repair may be something you can easily fix yourself, and you can find this information by going to www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and searching for 'repairs'.

If the repair is not simple, it will go through our Maintenance Hub, where a surveyor will assess what needs to be done and will then pass it to the correct services. This is the point at which a priority category is assigned, depending on the type of repair.

Categories

Emergency

We will start the repair within two hours and complete or make safe within 24 hours.

Urgent

We will complete the repair within five working days.

Routine

We will complete the repair within 20 working days.

Larger non-emergency repairs

We will agree a convenient time with you. Evening and Saturday morning appointments are available by request.

Right-to-repair scheme

The Right-to-Repair scheme covers certain repairs which may affect your health, safety or security. By law we must carry out these repairs within a certain time and they are known as 'qualifying repairs'.

For more information, go to our website and search for 'housing repairs'.

Making it easier to sort out complicated repairs

Next time that you report a complex repair, don't be surprised if the work gets authorised without a surveyor coming to inspect it first.



To speed up our service to you we've set up a Maintenance Hub, involving a small team of surveyors who work alongside the team that handles your repairs requests. This means that when a complicated repair is reported, a surveyor will diagnose the repair and if they're happy that they have enough information they'll approve the job without the need for a visit.

Keith Maddox is the first surveyor to join the Maintenance Hub and is already seeing an improvement in the turnaround time for complicated repairs: 'I've been working in the building trade in one form or another for 30 years, with 19 of them in the Housing Service, so I've got an extensive knowledge of our properties and what's needed to fix a problem. When a complicated repair comes through I know what questions to ask the customer. It's even better when they can send me photos of the problem as that can really help me to book the right operative for the job.'

Keith will be joined by a duty surveyor and an apprentice so that the service is available Monday to Friday during office hours.

So next time you contact us about a complicated repair, don't be surprised if we ask for a few photos - no selfies please!

Videos are online!

We know that some of our customers prefer to watch videos to learn information so we have added two about simple repairs that may help you sort your problem easily and simply.

If you find videos helpful, then take a look on our website. Search for 'repairs' and watch our apprentice, Ben, show how to remove a simple blockage. The site also has a link to download the tenant app, for when you need to report your repair.

We already have videos on what to do if you are at risk of becoming homeless, and relationship breakdown and housing. To view, search for 'homelessness' and 'relationship housing' on our website, and keep an eye out for more videos coming soon...

Those square code things



You may have seen square bar codes appear on shop windows, leaflets, magazines etc. These are called QR codes (Quick Response), and when scanned using your phone or tablet, will pop up a link directly to the web site, competition page, survey and so on.

We in the Housing team, as a way of improving convenience for our customers, have begun using this technology, so if you see a QR code, save yourself typing fiddly weblinks and scan it in. It's easy to do. Either focus on the code through your phone or tablet camera, or download one of the free QR Reader apps. Try it!

So who are the Independent Living Officers and what do they do?

Independent Living is an area that covers customers who live in supported accommodation, those who need a little extra support, and the more vulnerable of our residents.

The team that helps these people has changed a bit – some roles are remaining the same, just with different names, and some are new roles aimed at providing more specific support for those who need it.

Meet the team now:

Pat Bonnett

Senior Tenancy
Sustainment Officer



Number in Team: 5

Our main aim is to help people sustain their tenancies with the council, rather than carry out evictions. We want to help people to manage the problems that contribute to their tenancies failing and could ultimately lead to them losing their homes. We help people to manage their income and advise on debt repayments, and support vulnerable and older tenants who are struggling to cope at home due to illness or poor mobility or mental health problems and help them to move to more suitable accommodation.

We also provide help with accessing the housing register and help people to move to more suitable properties should their circumstances change and their current home no longer meet their needs. We can liaise between the agencies, supporting the tenant along the way.

Julie Bailey

Community Support
and Lifeline Officer



Number in Team: Recruiting

I respond to any community alarm calls from the Lifeline service, but I also check the Lifeline email box to check for any devices with low battery and system errors, then contact those customers to book in for appointments to sort out any problems.

I offer personal visits for all community support customers in Dunstable, make demonstration appointments for Lifeline referrals (including the Lifeline information packs), phone mini group customers to book appointments for their monthly visits and make appointments for outreach customer visits.

I also help replace old units if they are showing a fault, collecting equipment from across the area.

Jo Haynes

Senior Independent Living
Officer: Community Support



Number in Team: 4

I work at the Independent Living extra care schemes, Priory View and Red House Court. My main role is to make sure that the buildings are managed and maintained, and that the welfare and care needs of the residents at both sites are met.

I complete Needs Assessments on a yearly basis reviewing them if the client's needs change. We engage with our customers on a daily basis, helping to promote independence in a community setting.

Lisa Iwugo Lettings Officer

Number in Team: 6

My role is to advertise and match potential customers from the bidding process to their potential new homes. I will meet you to show you the property, and if you want to move in, I will sign you up to your new tenancy.

If you are a first time tenancy holder with the council, or you do not currently have a tenancy with us, you will be signed up onto an INTRO tenancy. I will visit you a few times during this first year, to ensure that you are managing your tenancy as well as you can, and to put you in contact with other teams if you need further support managing a tenancy.

Allyson Scott

Independent Living Officer:
Specialist Accommodation

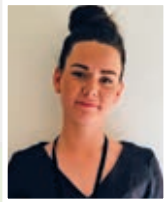
Number in Team: 5

I work at Kilgour Court, a transitional home for clients with low to medium mental health issues and substance abuse. I help them make their transition into permanent accommodation.

A lot of my time is spent writing up reports recommending specific courses of action and opportunities for support, and I also develop appropriate support plans. It's important that I work alongside other council services to provide the best care and support package we can, as well as partner agencies.

Sinead Maguire

Independent Living Officer:
Prevention



Number in Team: Recruiting

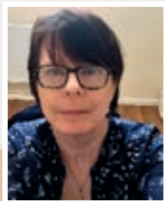
Our team offers a support service across Central Bedfordshire, helping vulnerable customers who are not our own tenants and who are at risk of homelessness. They might require targeted support to help them keep their current home and also support their move to suitable alternative accommodation.

We offer an outreach service and deliver support via our drop in sessions where anyone can come in for housing, benefits and correspondence advice.

I also work with customers who have been placed in temporary accommodation or are at risk of becoming homeless. I am part of a team that manages the local welfare benefits applications and associated duties.

Wendy Turner

Independent Living Officer:
Supported



Number in Team: 8

My role is to help customers live independently within our Independent Living Schemes (formerly Sheltered), with the assurance that their wellbeing is looked after. Most customers receive two calls weekly: one is a proactive visit and the other a phone call, although extra visits can be requested. I can also help with reporting repairs for those that are unable to do so themselves.

A major part of my role is building management which includes scheme inspections, fire alarm tests/drills and the testing of equipment such as pendants and pullcords on a regular basis.

Gemma Russell

Housing Operations Officer



Number in Team: 2

My role as Housing Operations Officer fits within the Independent Living team, to support operational services.

The aim is to make sure our service is efficient, effective, with good results and - most importantly - focused on the customer. We want to help the service to continue improving, and support the team if that means changing our processes or operations.

Margaret Wooltorton

Independent Living Support Officer,
Young Persons

Number in Team: Recruiting

I visit Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker children, i.e. 'looked after' children living independently in the community. I support young people to gain valuable life skills to manage when they move on to full independent living.

On arrival, I engage language translators as needed to help the child understand, and support with settling in, registering with all health professionals, show them the local shops, explain health and safety by demonstrating how to use the cooker and dishwasher etc, and how to maintain and keep their home clean. I also help with cooking, laundry, food shopping, and with budgeting for their food and bills as a skill for when they move on.

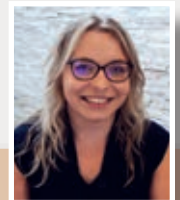
I support with their health and wellbeing, including hospital appointments, booking minor appointments with the nurse, and local places of prayer.

Along with the skills to live safely in the community and as a way of engaging, I help the young adults with paid and voluntary work, via CV's and job applications.

It's important that support is tailored to meet each individual child's needs, to help empower them to live independently.

Jessica Sharp

Reception Service
Administrator



Number in Team: 4

My job is to help with front of house duties at Priory View.

This means that I help visitors with directions or answer any queries but I also help residents with day to day queries - from helping them book appointments to reporting repairs.

I book meeting rooms, take payments, make daily building checks and book visiting family into the guest rooms. It's a big task but I also help organise the Priory View calendar!

If any events need support, I'm able to help with that and I help with daily calls to our residents - anything I can to make sure that everyone at Priory View are doing well and feel welcome.

SIRF Summer Event

The SIRF (Sheltered Involved Residents Forum) Committee has organised another triumph with their summer event.

Despite the muggy heat, the event was well attended and all enjoyed the lunch – a delicious lasagne from Lombardos of Dunstable, followed by donuts from Greggs in Houghton Regis.

One of the most popular items of any event is the raffle. SIRF's raffle included many items donated, including free meals at McDonalds, and items from the Co-op at Westfield Road. One attendee in particular did extremely well, winning a few items, which he was delighted with.

Anne Pamplin, part of the committee, said:

"We hold events twice a year, and were told we had done a good job. We would like to thank the apprentices and Housing team for their help and support." Val Mifsud, as jovial as ever, pulled me into a dance as Zing, the entertainers, started to sing, whilst Maggie Albon, SIRF's other committee member, made certain everyone had a drink and worked tirelessly with the rest of the group.

In all the committee raised £39, which will be added to the committee funds so that the team can keep holding these events.



There are many ways that you can get involved and the Tenant Involvement team are looking at new ways to involve our tenants in ways that suit you. Therefore, if you would like to join any of the groups or want more information, contact tenantinvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or call **0300 300 8302**.

Moving on from apprenticeships

Being one of the first apprentices to work at the council felt quite daunting to me, but the support I received from the teams I had the pleasure of working with was incredible.

I was over the moon to be given the opportunity to work for the council, and I am thankful for this great opportunity as I am now a permanent member of staff in the Housing Solutions team, working as a Trainee Technical Officer/Environmental Practitioner.

At the start of the process I was offered the opportunity to complete a Chartered Institute of Housing Level 3 Qualification with the support of Moulton College. This was a great opportunity as it gave me a good understanding of housing knowledge.

During my year apprenticeship, I worked in two different teams – firstly under Housing Services in the Income Management team. My colleagues in this team were incredible, they were all very knowledgeable and supported me in my daily tasks. The second team I had the privilege working for was Private Sector Housing in the Housing Solutions team. Working here was amazing. I was given the opportunity to work with people and help to support them

in accessing Disabled Facilities Grants, which gave me such satisfaction.

As my apprenticeship was only for a year, I knew that I needed to start looking for work. Fortunately, a job became advertised for a Technical Support Officer, which I applied for straight away. The idea of not working for the council alongside all the kind people I met along the way, wasn't something I was willing to leave behind so easily. I applied for the job with all the knowledge I had gained from working in Private Sector Housing and was successful.

Being part of the apprenticeship scheme was an amazing experience and I would highly recommend this route. I learned and achieved so much in that first year, and being an apprentice here at the council even led to my brother applying for an apprenticeship and he is now a permanent member of the Licensing team, as a Licensing Officer!



Fly-tipping and waste management: what you need to know

Fly-tipping is a serious offence.

Did you know that it is a criminal offence to pass your waste to an unlicensed person or company? You could be prosecuted and face an unlimited fine.

How can I stop my waste being fly-tipped?

These handy hints will help you dispose of household waste legally if using a builder, tradespeople or contractors to carry out work on your home.

- Ask to see the company or person's Waste Carriers Licence.
- Check that they are authorised to carry your waste by contacting the Environmental Agency on **08708 506 506** or online at **www.gov.uk/environment-agency**
- Keep a note of any vehicle registration numbers, names and contact details.
- Provide a full description of the waste for the waste carrier giving details of any unusual characteristics that could affect how they plan to handle or dispose of it.
- Find out where the waste is going and check that they can accept it. If you are in doubt, check that your waste got there.
- Keep all paperwork for at least two years.

Remember your waste is your responsibility until it ends up in a legitimate place or has been passed to a person or company that is authorised to dispose of it correctly and have provided you with a proper valid receipt.

Please don't get caught out by people who will charge you, pocket the money then fly-tip the waste.

Please help us to stop this criminal activity. If residents are aware of the law and don't pass their waste over, these people won't have to fly-tip and we won't see as much of our beautiful countryside blighted by this problem.

Are you disposing of your waste yourself?

There are four tidy tips (called Household Waste Recycling Centres) within Central Bedfordshire.

1. Ampthill: Abbey Lane, MK45 2SA
2. Biggleswade: Bells Brook, SG18 0NA
3. Leighton Buzzard: Shenley Hill Road, LU7 3BT
4. Thorn Turn, Grendall Lane (Off Thorn Road) LU5 6GJ

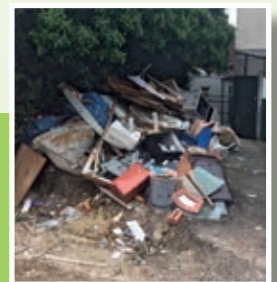
Alternatively, the council offers a chargeable collection service for bulky waste. For more details please visit **www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/bulkywaste**. Please note, the removal of fridges and freezers is a separate chargeable service.

Report fly-tipping

You can report fly-tipping to us by telephoning **0300 300 8302**, emailing **customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**, or by using the tenant app.

If you see fly-tipped waste, or witness someone in the act of fly-tipping, here's what we need to know:

- any vehicles involved (please note registration numbers). It's possible to prosecute if only the vehicle, not the driver, is identifiable (the person controlling the use of the vehicle can be prosecuted)
- what you saw (were there people involved? What were they wearing?)
- where the fly-tip is (road names and town/village names are always helpful)
- when you saw the fly-tipping (day, date and time are helpful)



As fly-tippers are doing something illegal they do not want to be caught. Do not approach them or put your own safety at risk!

Please note: The council doesn't clear waste from private land, as that would be the responsibility of the landowner. However, we will work with the landowner and investigate incidents of fly-tipping to share best practise on how to reduce incidents and prosecute those responsible where possible.

A woodland walk

Priory View has been open to residents and customers alike for two years now, and in that time the gardens have flourished. Flowers are blooming in the raised beds, and the vegetables are growing admirably in the hot weather, with the care and attention given by the residents.



The woodland walk is an area to the side of the building, where the original trees were left and a path put in so that the area can be enjoyed by all. With the attention on the main gardens, this area was beginning to look a bit unloved, so a group of residents, in collaboration with Groundwork East, have put down bark chippings, plants and a bug hotel for those important visitors.

To complete the area, the Housing team have provided two brightly coloured benches, at the request of the residents, so that they can enjoy sitting in the shade of the trees. **Well done to all involved.**

Your journey back into employment starts with a few steps

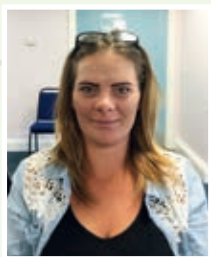
There are many reasons why people find themselves unemployed and many more reasons why it can be difficult for them to return to work. Support and guidance is key for some people to realise their potential.

In the last edition of Housing Matters, we printed an article about a group of customers who attended Inspire, a course funded by housing to help our residents back into work. The course was oversubscribed, enjoyed by all, and led to job offers and volunteering opportunities for the attendees. The success was so great, that some of the attendees have shared their experience of the course and what it has meant for them.

Jade

A little bit about yourself.

I left school and did hairdressing, bar work and cleaning before stopping to have children in 2009. I have been out of work for nine years.



How did you learn about the course?

Walking through the library and saw the Inspire signage

What prompted you to apply?

I was in baby-mode and had to do something! I thought 'enough is enough'.

How did you feel when you started?

I suffer with anxiety so was very nervous, but also excited as saw what I wanted to achieve and thought this could be the beginning of something good.

What was the best part of the course for you?

The course itself, what it has led to, and my built confidence.

What was the hardest part for you?

Joining and making that first step.

How did you feel when you finished?

To begin, I thought this was rubbish, it's not going to get me back into work, but 100% - my confidence is the highest in a long time. I've still got other courses to go to, so I won't forget what I learnt just through joining.

What was the outcome?

I now have a part-time role plus further courses in food hygiene, computing and maths. Hoping to get some volunteering work accounting, as I did this at college years back.

What would you say to someone who was thinking about going on the course?

100% do it! Without a doubt.

Shirley

A little bit about yourself.

I worked doing admin from 17 years old for around 24 years. I was made redundant and was out of work for 18 months. I started doing chores and working with the elderly, then was out of work again as I left to care for someone.



How did you learn about the course?

Richard Carrington, Housing Employment Officer, contacted me about the course and I was pleased to attend.

What prompted you to apply?

I had spent so long out of work and wanted to get out and meet people again.

How did you feel when you started?

I was very anxious and nervous when I started. I had been out of work so long. But I was proud of leaving house and coming along as I am usually a bubbly person.

What was the best part of the course for you?

Realising that I was not alone with mental health issues, and being given the opportunity to shine. I know that I am 'in there' somewhere and have been given a chance to come out again. I also made a lot of friends at the course.

What was the hardest part for you?

Realising that I needed help, and walking in that first day.

How did you feel when you finished?

I was given tools for an interview. It brought out my confidence and to be honest there was a lot I didn't know I had within me. I didn't feel confident enough before to achieve.

"Inspire: I have been inspired!"

What was the outcome?

Full-time post in a job that I want to do.

What would you say to someone who was thinking about going on the course?

I would recommend it. 5 stars! They would be silly not to join. I got myself an ideal job.

If you would like more information about any of the employment courses that are available, please contact

Richard Carrington at

tenantinvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Carl

A little bit about yourself.

I had recently been made redundant from a large airline after being employed for seven and a half years. I had been out of work for two months living off my redundancy money whilst looking for another job.

How did you learn about the course?

I met with Sandie at a Jobs Fair held at Dunstable, she kindly took the time to explain what the course was and how it would benefit me.

We met again a couple of weeks later for coffee and to review my CV and to answer a few questions. The course was designed to meet the candidates' needs and what they wanted from it.

What prompted you to apply?

During the time I was out of work, I was applying for various different positions and not being very successful. I had not applied for or had a job interview for nearly eight years so I thought my skills would need to be refreshed.

How did you feel when you started?

With any new situation, where you meet new people and start learning again, there were some nerves. However, all of the staff and fellow candidates made me feel really welcome and after the first session we all got on really well. Everyone had different reasons for being there and different stories and suggestions which helped. It was a relaxed environment where we could all learn from each other.

What was the best part of the course for you?

Hearing the positive news that our fellow candidates had been to interviews and some had been successful in gaining employment that suited them. It gave us all a real boost of confidence that if they can do it, so can we.

What was the hardest part for you?

Initially I thought the hardest part for me would be the mock interviews held towards the end of the course. This is one area that I thought my skills were lacking due to confidence and answering questions. However, through the practise and preparation that we did in the classroom it turned out great.

How did you feel when you finished?

I felt sad that we were all leaving as we had all formed a bond and wanted to keep in touch with everyone to see how we were all doing.

My confidence for interviews grew (leading to a full-time job!) and I went from being depressed at the start of the journey to coming out with a positive attitude that I can get a job.

What was the outcome?

During the course, I was contacted by an employer and asked to attend an interview. I heard back a few days later that I had been successful and started full time employment a few days after the course ended.

What would you say to someone who was thinking about going on the course?

I would advise whether you have been out of work for a short time or many months/years - attend this course. Even if you think you have the best CV or think that you have the greatest interview techniques you will still learn things.

The start of your journey back into employment starts with a few steps.... Inspire!

Steve

A little bit about yourself.

I was out of work for a long time due to illness. I started on the course, got more confident and was lucky I was at the right place at the right time. I got back into design work, where I had worked most of my adult life.

How did you learn about the course?

At a Jobs Fair in Dunstable.

What prompted you to apply?

The course trainer approached me and really sold the course with her positive attitude about it.

How did you feel when you started?

I was very nervous to start with, but the group made me feel very welcome and I got more confident each day I was on the course.

What was the best part of the course for you?

Meeting people in the same situation and getting all the information shared on the course, to use it to apply for jobs.

What was the hardest part for you?

Speaking in front of a group, as I'm not confident.

How did you feel when you finished?

I felt great when finished. I passed the course, made some really lovely friends and received kind words about being one of the stars of the course. Even now I am working, I am still helping others that were on the course with job applications.

What was the outcome?

A new job, a new positive outlook and some good friends trying to achieve the same outcome.

What would you say to someone who was thinking about going on the course?

Go on the course. It would be very worthwhile and I would recommend it to anyone.

Hub Café

Sandringham Drive

The Hub Café (in Houghton Regis) is run by a group of volunteers who meet each Tuesday.



Prices range from 30p for a squash, to £1.50 for a jacket potato and £3.00 for quiche and salad. The directors, Rob and Wayne, have been running the café for four years - the venture was set up and managed by them.

Annie, who supports the group, said: *"The main reason for setting up the cafe was because people said they wanted somewhere to work, but also somewhere that felt safe for other 'vulnerable' people to come. So we said 'well set something up then!' We've had lots of unexpected consequences - the most important are probably that the group are known in their community, other people look out for them and they have valued roles."*

Not only do they run the café, the directors and other volunteers are famous after appearing in their own video and most recently on BBC Radio 3 Counties to talk about what they do. There was also a chat about another filming session for a local news show.

The good news does not stop there. The Baptist Church in Hammersmith Gardens also use their culinary services for their over 50's club, where they have around 40 people who get together for a lunch, prepared and served by the café team. The team have also provided outside catering for a number of local events, including consultations, the Royal Wedding celebrations and Music in Bedford Square.

The Hub Café received Health Lottery funding in the past. Since becoming a Community Interest Company, the Café uses its income to pay for many things but is also looking for local funding as they are hoping to expand. They have just received a very generous donation from Whitbread PLC and are asking local companies, organisations and individuals to commit to regular monthly giving.

The Hub Cafe is open to anyone, is an excellent example of a community venture, and is open every Tuesday from 1pm to 3pm. So why not sample their good hospitality and very reasonable prices, and know that you are supporting your community.

And their service is expanding.

If you are unable to go to the Sandringham Drive Café, a trial service at the Houghton Regis Baptist Church, Hammersmith Gardens, started Wednesday 15th August, 10.00 – 11.30am. Further dates to be provided.

If you would like to learn more about the Hub Café, you can visit their facebook page or contact the cafe on Tel: **07785 261140** Email: **hubcafe@mail.com**

UC Universal Credit

how it affects you and what to do

If you are of working age and claiming a benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), you will now need to apply for Universal Credit.

Universal Credit is being rolled out to everyone in Central Bedfordshire during October and November 2018.

How it affects you

Universal Credit is a one lump sum monthly payment, combining all your benefits, including housing benefit, income support, Income based Job Seekers Allowance, Income related Employment and Support Allowance, and Child and Working Tax Credits.

As this is a one monthly payment, you will need to think about the month ahead and plan how you will spend your benefit.

Universal credit is an online benefit, managed online, therefore you will need access to the internet. If you need support, talk to your work coach about PBS (Personal Budgeting Support) or APA (Alternative Payment Arrangements).

Universal Credit does not cover council tax support. You will need to contact the Council Tax team for guidance on how to apply. Go to **www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk** and search for ctax for details and applications.

Universal Credit only affects those of working age. If you receive pension credit, you will still receive housing benefit paid directly to your landlord until further notice.

At this time, Universal Credit only applies to new claimants, or a change to your circumstances which means you need to change your current benefit. Universal Credit does not affect your disability benefits, ie: Personal Independent Payment and Disability Living Allowance.

What to do

If your circumstances change, or you are making a new claim, you will need to apply for Universal Credit.

To apply, visit **www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit**. Make certain that you have proof of ID, rent statement, national insurance and proof of the address you live at to speed up your payment. The responsibility is on you to apply and maintain your claim via the internet. If you do not apply and maintain your claim online, you may not receive your benefit.

If you received housing benefit, you will be responsible for paying your rent from your Universal Credit directly to your landlord. For council tenants, we are your landlord. It is important to set up a payment plan with your Income Management Officer to avoid getting into arrears and potentially losing your home. You can contact them on **0300 300 8046**.

For support and advice on universal credit, see **www.gov.uk/universal-credit**, and **www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/universal-credit-an-introduction**

You can get advice on managing your money from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, or go to **www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/beginners-guide-to-managing-your-money**



More and more people are choosing to pay their rent by direct debit

Direct Debit is the hassle-free way to pay all your rent, whether it is for your home, garage or Lifeline.

We offer monthly collections, any day from the 1st to the 28th of the month or weekly collections each Monday, and you can still take advantage of the 'rent free weeks'!

If the payment date falls on a weekend, we will take the payment on the next working day and don't worry you can still pay by Direct Debit if you receive some Housing Benefit, all you need is a bank account!

All banks and building societies operate a direct debit guarantee as set out below:

- If the amounts to be paid or the payment dates change, Central Bedfordshire Council will notify you at least ten working days in advance of your account being debited, or as otherwise agreed.
- If an error is made by your bank you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund of the amount paid.
- You can cancel a direct debit at any time by writing to your bank or building society. Please also send a copy of your letter to the Housing Rents team. You would need to make alternative arrangements to pay if you still owe any rent.

No forms to fill in, just give the **Housing Rents team** a call on: **0300 300 5545** or **0300 300 5186**

It's simple to arrange, just have your bank account details to hand and we will do the rest!

Supporting tenants into employment **Jobs Fair** a great success

The Tenant Involvement team have continued to deliver a range of employment training to help tenants move into employment.

At the recent Dunstable Job fair around 300 local people were able to speak with organisations with as many as 90 people likely to be called back for an interview or further talks as a result.

Courses that might work for you...

Inspire employability. This training is aimed at people who may have not worked for a long while or find work challenging. There is a lot of personal support and guidance and the tutor meets each student before they commit to help them understand what is involved. There are a series of eight one-day workshops covering a wide range of subjects dealing with looking for the right job, how to apply, mock interviews and what to do when you start in the job.

First aid in the Work Place. This level 3 qualification is great at helping people who maybe have not been involved in training for a number of years. The students benefit from taking the training, meeting other people and also have the benefit of a good qualification to enhance their cv.

Kitchen skills and Food Hygiene. Another level three qualification but studied over three days. This qualification will help in the application stage for a wide range of jobs, not necessarily just those in catering. Like the other courses there is plenty of personal support and the tutors are keen to help students with low confidence or inexperience of training.

If you are interested in finding out when the next course may be running please contact **tenantinvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk** or call the **Housing Employment Officer** on **0300 300 5201**



Don't wait until winter for the flu jab

The NHS is urging people to have the flu jab well before winter.

Free Flu jabs

Those entitled to a free flu jab are:

- pregnant women
- children aged between two and nine on 31 August 2018
- people with long-term health conditions like lung disease, diabetes, heart or kidney disease
- those aged 65 years and over
- carers

For more information about how to get a free flu vaccine contact your local GP, midwife or your community pharmacy now or visit www.nhs.uk/staywell



nhs.uk/staywell



Diary Dates

October • November • December 2018

Date	Time	Title	Details & Location
Sat 13th October	7:30pm	Pride of Houghton awards	The Memorial Hall, The Green, Houghton Regis
Tues 16th October	5:30pm	An Evening at the Circus	Village Green, Houghton Regis
Sat 3rd November	7:00pm	Fireworks Display	Brooklands School, Leighton Buzzard
Sun 4th November	6:00-8:00pm	Fireworks Display	Tithe Farm Recreation Ground, Houghton Regis
Mon 5th November	6:00pm	Dunstable Fireworks Display	Creasey Park Community Football Centre, Dunstable
Sat 24th November	10:00-3:00pm	Bedfordshire Day	Priory House Dunstable, Church and Gardens
Wed 28th November	1:00-6:00pm	Find Your Future	Rufus Centre, Flitwick – A free careers and employment event for adults and young people seeking new opportunities
Fri 30th November - Sun 2nd December		Christmas Festival Weekend	Leighton Buzzard Town Centre (see Facebook page)
Fri 7th December	7:00pm	Christmas Tree Carols and Torchlight Processions	Ashton Square, Dunstable
Sat 8th December	10:00-2:00pm	Santa's Grotto	Houghton Regis Library (see Facebook page)
Sat 8th December	10:00-4:00pm	Mistletoe Magic	Priory House, Dunstable
Mon 24th December	9:00-2:00pm	Christmas Eve Market	Town Centre, Leighton Buzzard
Mon 24th December	7:00pm	Christmas Carols	Leighton Buzzard High Street

For further information on the above events, or to find more events local to you, visit your town council website or call them for details

Performance Update			
How are we doing?	Results for April and May 2018	Target for 2018	
Repairs completed on time	96.8%	90%	↑
Satisfaction with repairs	91.6%	90%	↑
Sign up to the Tenants App	648	No target	
Actions on Tenants App	34	No target	

Fancy a ghost walk through Dunstable?

Family Ghost Walk in Costume

Saturday 27th October at 6.30pm suitable for children over 8 years accompanied by adults
then a walk at 8.00pm.

Wednesday 31st October a walk at 8.00pm.

Friday 28th December a walk at 8.00pm.

All walks start outside the Priory Church.
Tickets are **£5.00 for adults**,
£2.50 for children, and must be booked
through Priory House on **01582 891420**.



Get in touch

-  www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
-  www.facebook.com/letstalkcentral
-  @letstalkcentral
-  @centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
-  0300 300 8302
-  Central Bedfordshire Council,
Watling House, High Street North,
Dunstable, LU6 1LF



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Find out more

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Central Bedfordshire