

Spring 2018

The magazine from Central Bedfordshire Council
for our tenants and leaseholders

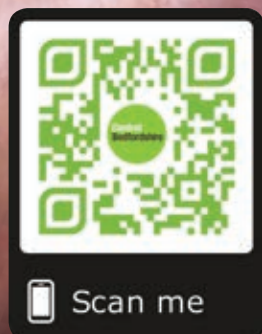
Central
Bedfordshire

Housing Matters

great
services

Have you got the new Tenant App?

Use it to report repairs,
manage your rent and
a whole lot more.



To download the App, go to
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
and search for tenant app

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Tenant Survey: the Results!

Are you one of the 622 people who completed our tenant survey at the end of last year?

If you are, thank you. We really appreciate you taking the time to tell us how you feel about the Housing Service.

What did you tell us through the survey?

Here are some highlights

- You want to know what's happening about planned maintenance
- You think we should get better at managing anti-social behaviour
- You want us to make it easier to contact the Housing Service
- You're concerned about the general upkeep of the area that you live in

The Survey Results

We asked you to score the main areas of the service out of ten and say what's most important to you

SERVICE AREA

1	The overall quality of the home you live in	78%	5	Contacting the Housing Service	74%
2	The standard of repairs you've had in your home	74%	6	The way that anti-social behaviour is dealt with	57%
3	The planned maintenance of your property – for example windows, roofs, kitchen, bathroom	52%	7	The information you get from the Housing Service	70%
4	The general upkeep of the area you live in – for example grounds maintenance – grass cutting, removal of graffiti	70%	8	The way you are treated by the Housing Service	74%
			9	The opportunity to have your say about the Housing Service	76%

We asked how you prefer to receive information from the Housing Service

Email	69%	Email was your preferred option, however as we contacted many of you by email to complete the survey we recognise this would have affected the results.
Letter	61%	
Housing Matters	24%	
Phone	18%	We can see however that receiving the information in writing is important to many of you.
In Person	13%	
Website	12%	

We asked if you would like more information on any of the following topics. Here's the prioritised list of what you wanted to know more about

- Tenancy Support – Health and Wellbeing
- Rightsizing – moving to a home to suit your needs
- Tenant Involvement
- Fire Safety
- Employment Training / Job Clubs
- Independent Living
- Volunteering
- Money Management
- Universal Credit
- Apprenticeships

We have been in contact with everyone who requested more information on the above topics.

If you have not been contacted – did you complete the survey anonymously?

For example, 117 of you ticked to receive more information about Tenancy Support – Health and Wellbeing. However, 22 of you who ticked this completed it anonymously so we couldn't give you more information. If you requested information on any of the above topics and haven't heard from us, please contact tenant.survey@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and we'll send you the information.

We asked whether you read Housing Matters, published quarterly

Altogether a fantastic 79% of you either fully or partially read Housing Matters. It means this magazine is a great way to tell you about upcoming changes as a result of this survey.

Of the 14% who do not read Housing Matters, you've told us the main reason is 'Content not relevant to me' (40%), 'Not Interesting' (33%) and 'Don't have time' (30%).

We asked for your comments about the service

327 of you told us what you thought about the service. Here's some of those comments

“There should be more regular inspections of the estate. Bin cupboards should be checked for tipping
Phone service makes it very difficult to speak to the right person.
Communal areas need addressing.
Just an answer to emails would be nice.
Better wording on some communications would be good.
Maintenance and general updating needs to be made more public.
Not being called back.
Some repair work shoddy - maybe tenants should be asked if they want to pay for extra added finish for a better job?”

Have a read through the rest of Housing Matters and look out for this symbol.

It means that the article is about how we are making changes in response to the survey results.



Tenant Survey

Thankfully it's not all bad...

“Overall I think the service is excellent. The staff are wonderful and helpful on the whole. I think the way I have been treated by the council has been amazing.
This is my first time in council accommodation. At the moment, it seems too good to be true.
Rent is good value.
Pretty good service.
I have always found the services very good.
Overall everything is pretty good.
Have a lovely very helpful housing officer”

We asked you to name the one thing that we need to improve in the Housing Service

372 of you had a say on this. Here's your top five improvements.

- Contact with the Housing Service – including wait time for calls and not calling back / responding to written communications
 - Quality of repairs
 - Information about planned maintenance
 - Dealing with Anti-social behaviour
 - Staff attitude / knowledge
- We will be focusing on all of these areas in upcoming Housing Matters, starting with planned maintenance and Anti-social behaviour in this issue.

Prize Draw

Thank you to those who provided their contact details. We included everyone who gave their details into our prize draw, which took place at the end of January 2018.

Our main winner chose a £250 Argos voucher, we hope you enjoyed your prize.

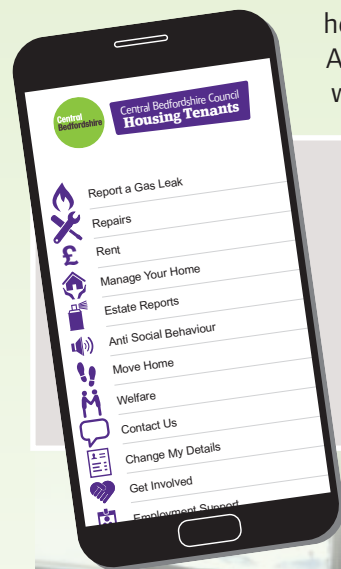
Housing Repairs

Battling with the 'Beast from the East'

Whilst the recent extreme weather made us all want to close the door and stay at home, that wasn't an option for Housing Repairs. With many of you having problems caused by the snow and freezing conditions, the team rolled out the cold weather plan and got to work.

There was a 500% increase in calls to us during the bad weather

Big thanks to Jeakins Weir, our repairs contractors who brought in extra staff to handle emergency calls and got out and about to deliver the temporary heaters that some of you needed. And big thanks to our staff who worked evenings and weekends.



Our new computer technology meant we could intercept emergency calls to contractors and help quickly

Lots of you decided not to use the already busy phone lines to report problems and instead used the new tenants app. Anyone calling on a mobile phone automatically received a text message with a link a short 'how to' video on the Council's winter weather page that helped some of you to resolve issues yourself.

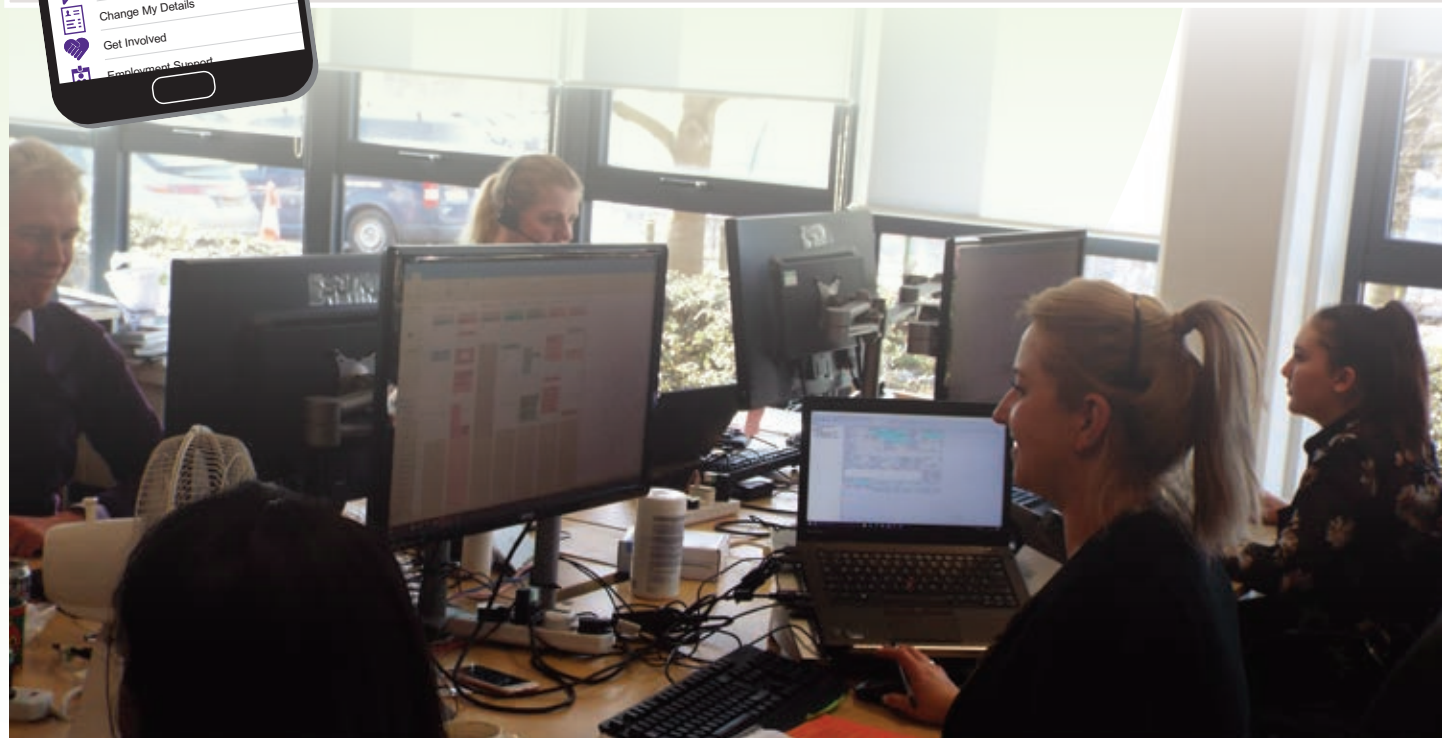
During the bad weather, our heating contractor took over 400 emergency phone calls every day



Getting ready for next time...

(keep this info safe because it will snow again one day!)

Modern condensing boilers have a plastic overflow pipe near the boiler flue on the outside of the property that can freeze. If you pour hot water - not boiling water - over this pipe, it might be possible to thaw it out. When the pipe is clear you can press the boiler reset button and the boiler should light as normal. If this doesn't work please report the problem as usual and an engineer will call as soon as possible.



Download the Housing Tenants App

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

Tenants' Scrutiny Panel (TSP)

Hello everyone, from the TSP,



Hope you are feeling a little warmer after the beast from the east.

We are meeting to select the next topic to scrutinise. We have just finished our enquiry into homelessness and the one thing that stood out was the need for more housing. There is a shortage of new council housing being built. There is a lot of pressure on budgets to house customers in temporary accommodation as a result of the shortage.

If you want to join we meet every fortnight and welcome new members. Instead of complaining, come and find out what is happening and make a difference. We are all volunteers and an independent voice for tenants like yourself and it is a good chance to meet with others.

Chair of TSP
Mal Miles

If you would like to get involved with the panel in 2018 please email
TenantInvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Correction...

and apologies for any confusion

As stated in the Winter 2017/18 issue of Housing Matters, when searching on the app store or Google Play for the Tenant App please search "Central Bedfordshire Council Housing".

We apologise for the error.



Supported Involved Residents Forum (SIRF)



Hi & hope you had a nice Easter holiday,

A reminder that SIRF continues to meet at 2pm on the last Wednesday of the month, most months at Red House Court in Houghton Regis. All are welcome to our informal catch ups, where you can raise any housing issues with other residents of Independent Living and staff.

If you want to come along we welcome new and old attendees.

For more information please email
TenantInvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

How you can get involved

We want tenants to have a say in how we provide the housing services in the future.

We do this through our Tenant and Leaseholders involvement panels.

If you are interested, some examples of the ways you can be involved are below.

Please check our website for more details or contact us to discuss an option to suit you. Whether you wish to volunteer regularly or just to gain some experience for your CV.

Way Forward Panel (WFP)

Review changes to the service and hear about changes first.

Tenant Investment Panel (TIP)

Look at our proposed spending priorities

Editorial panel

You can check that our letters and publications are relevant and easy to understand

We hope to hear from you, please contact us at
TenantInvolvement@centralbedfordshire

Join our SNAP Parent Carer Forum

If you have a child or young person aged up to 25 who has special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND), we need your input on how to improve services.

SNAP Parent Carer Forum works with the council, education authorities, health providers and other organisations to ensure the services they plan and deliver meet the needs of children and young people in the area.

As part of the forum you will be able to provide feedback on current issues regarding the services you access. You don't need to commit lots of time as you are only invited to attend those topics that are relevant to your family.

If you would like to get involved and become a member of **SNAP PCF** please contact **SNAP PCF** on **07984 545044** or email **admin@snappcf.org.uk**

Find out more about SNAP at: **www.snappcf.org.uk**

UC Universal Credit

What you need to know

Universal Credit is a single monthly payment for people in and out of work.

The idea behind Universal Credit is to simplify the benefits system by merging six benefits and tax credits into one payment. Universal Credit is replacing:

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

It does not replace council tax benefit so this needs to be claimed separately.

It is being rolled out in stages across the country. The full rollout in Central Bedfordshire is due from autumn 2018.

We understand this is a huge change for some of our customers and want to support you as much as we can.

Universal credit is paid directly to claimants via their bank account, the payment made will include their housing costs or rent in a single payment and will be paid monthly in arrears.

We would recommend a direct debit be set up on your date of payment to ensure your rent is paid to us as your landlord on time and your rent account remains clear.

Where to look for information and support:

- To make a claim and access a personal planner to prepare for the changes, go to **http://ucpp.dwp.gov.uk/universal-credit-preparation/**
- To watch a video about Universal Credit, have a look on YouTube - **http://youtu.be/E7GUu7Xa7Nw**
- For budgeting help and support, visit **www.gov.uk/government/publications/budgeting-your-universal-credit-quick-guide**
- Visit the Money Advice Service at **www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk**
- Speak to a Credit Union. There are credit unions in Luton and Bedford who offer competitive savings and loan rates and operate 'jam jar' accounts to help you manage your bills. Find out more at **www.creditunions.co.uk**

If you are a council tenant and are being placed on universal credit please contact the Income management team at Watling house Dunstable to discuss a payment plan and to get advice. **Tel 0300 300 8046.**



All change for the Estates Management team

We know from the recent Tenant Survey that many of you want to know more about your Estates team and the jobs that they do. We've recently made some changes to how the team works so it seems like an ideal time to bring you up to date with who they are and what they do.

Areas

Beecroft Weatherby Northfields Dunstable Centre, Union St area Tilsworth Stanbridge Eggington Eaton Bray Chiltern View Site	Leighton Buzzard Linslade Heath and Reach	Houghton Regis (Tithe Farm Estate, Bidwell Hill and Bedford Rd areas Toddington Wingfield Tebworth Hockliffe Totternhoe Potton Site	Downside Dunstable Town up to and including West St Furness Ave Spoondell Caddington Slip End Kensworth East Hyde Studham Timberlands site	Parkside, Houghton Regis Dunstable up to and including Great Northern Rd Flitwick Priory View Brookfield Area Sundon Barton Streatley Sharpenhoe Manor Park Manor Close Red House Court
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Estate Management Officers

Anne Ronan	Denise Davidson	Julia Southern	Ocean Fitzpatrick	Sue Connelly
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Estate Services Officer

Andy Harvey	Keith Chapman	Peter Ronan	Kevin Foley	Karen Elliott
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Estate Services Officers - Communal Gardens, Independent Living Schemes

Sam Martin	Phillip Ryan	Ben Crallan
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What we do

Estate Management Officers are responsible for making sure our housing estates are well looked after. One of the ways that they do this through their monthly estate inspections where they keep an eye out for external repairs, anti-social behaviour and anything that needs care and attention. If you are interested in joining them on these walkabouts please get in touch. The team are also responsible for:-

- Providing advice and support to help you maintain fixed term tenancy
- Dealing with tenancy problems, nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- Assisting with questions about rightsizing (moving to a smaller property)
- And anything to do with your tenancy agreement

Estate Services Officer are out and about, whatever the weather! They have a varied role, depending on the time of year, the jobs that gets spotted by the Estate Management Officers on the monthly estate inspections and they ensure that the condition of our housing estates are well maintained.

Housing Assistants are the people that keep the engine room running! They are responsible for everything to do with renting of garages, tenancy change requests – and giving everyday support to the Estate Management Officers.

Garage areas

Leighton Buzzard and Tithe Farm, Houghton Regis
Dunstable and Parkside, Houghton Regis

Housing Assistant

Amanda Goldsmith
Julie Ward

Getting in touch

Estate Management Officers – Phone them direct or email **name.surname@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**
General – Phone **0300 300 8302** or email – **Estate.management@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**
or visit our website and download the Mobile App for Tenants to send queries and report problems

You said We did

You said

'We need to improve the time it takes to answer repairs calls'

'Sometimes it takes forever to get through to housing repairs'

We did

You don't have to wait in line for your call to be answered. If you've got a non-urgent repair you can use the Mobile App for Tenants or the online form. Just go onto our website and search for tenant app.

You said

Get the housing team out of the office, into the community

We did

Check out the article on page 7 – Find out all about the changes in the Estates Management team

You said

I have been searching for hours for information about planned upgrades on doors, windows. More communication about what is planned would be great.

We did

See the article on page 8 – we're improving our approach to planned maintenance to make sure we are spending money (that includes your rent) on the right things at the right time

We're on the lookout for new apprentices – do you know any likely candidates?



University of
Bedfordshire

Central
Bedfordshire

Following on from the success of our ongoing Apprenticeship programme in the housing service, we're looking to recruit eight more over the next six months. If you, or anyone you know is interested in finding out more, go to the website – www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/apprenticeships and search for Apprenticeships.

We've currently got seven apprentices in post now and they are all getting great work experience whilst studying for an NVQ at the same time. Gone are the days of apprentices being expected to make the coffee and do the filing. We're a modern service and our apprentices are learning whilst they're earning. Yes, they start off by learning the basics of being at work and customer service but within a few months they all have their own responsibilities and become a valued part of the team they're working in.



0300 300 8131



academy@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



www.theacademy-inspiringfutures.co.uk



@academyinspiringfutures

The Academy
of Social Work and Early Intervention

Changing our Asset Maintenance Plan with you in mind



Tenant
Survey

What's happening with the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms...

In our recent tenant survey, we had lots of comments about the planned maintenance programme for the replacement of kitchens, bathrooms, windows and roofs. People wanted to know what's in the programme and where they could find it.

"I have no information about any future planned maintenance for my area."

Keep us updated about future plans for our properties."

How the planned maintenance programme worked in the past

Some of you may remember that we used to publish a plan of when we would be replacing kitchens, bathrooms, windows and roofs.

The plan was based on assumptions on how long things should last – for example 20 years for kitchens, and surveys that were done on some, but not all of our properties.

Whilst the plan worked, it did have some problems.

For example, individual kitchens age at different times and it's not a good use of money (in many cases your rent money) to replace a kitchen in good condition simply because it has reached a certain age.

How we are changing our approach to planned maintenance

Our new plan is to carry out a full stock condition survey, including every property, every five years. (The previous surveys would only cover a section of our properties and we would use that info to make decisions about every property).

Over time, this will give us a good picture of the condition of all of our properties. The next step in our new approach is to think in a smarter way when you ask us to fix something in your home.

For example, if you have a problem in your bathroom and the repair cannot be done, or something is below the standards we expect in your home, or the repair would not be good value for money. The job will be passed to the surveying team to add it to the planned maintenance programme. This means no more waiting for a space on the next year's programme – the work will be done in your home at the next available opportunity.

You can also get in contact if you haven't got a specific repair but you do feel that your kitchen and /or bathroom has got to a point of needing to be replaced. If that's the situation, a surveyor will come and visit your property and carry out an assessment, based on its age and our acceptable condition standards.

As soon as we've firmed up the plans, we'll put information on our website. In the meantime, if you would like to ask any questions or report your kitchen or bathroom please use the new tenant app.

Find it at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and search for tenant app.