

Winter 2018/19

The magazine from Central Bedfordshire Council
for our tenants and leaseholders

Central
Bedfordshire

Housing Matters

great
services

**"I watched
Gale Court
being built"**

See Page 8

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Introduction

from **James Yeomans**
Head of Housing Property

I am extremely pleased to be able to update the readers of **Housing Matters** on the **Housing Property team**.

The Housing Property team is responsible for keeping our residents safe in their homes by managing council house repairs, health and safety works and improvements such as new kitchens and bathrooms.

To make sure the service we provide meets your needs, we have recently introduced the Property Maintenance Forum. The forum has been formed to give tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to work with us to improve the service.

We want residents to tell us how we are doing by getting involved and there are several ways to do this:

1. Email us, tell us your views, aspirations and priorities
2. Attend the forum meetings and join the discussion
3. Get hands on, come and inspect completed work
4. We are also looking for the right person to chair our meetings

The Property Maintenance Forum will meet monthly and we will share the subjects to be discussed in advance.

This is your chance to have your say and influence what is happening!

James Yeomans
Head of Housing Property

If you are interested in the improvement of the housing repairs and maintenance and would like to make a difference to the quality of your council home please contact,
CBCPropertyMgmt@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Tenant App

As a tenant of Central Bedfordshire Council, did you know that you can report repairs, pay rent and report estate issues via the tenant app? It's quick and easy to use, so save yourself a phone call and log in today.

Download the Housing Tenants App
Report repairs, manage your rent, apply to move home and more...

Take part in our survey for a chance to win a

£100
gift voucher

In early February, we're sending out a text message survey about our services. It's a short survey with questions covering everything from the standard of repairs and quality of your home, to how we listen to your views and act on them.

Completing the survey will only take a few minutes and you will automatically be entered into a prize draw for a £100 gift voucher from a store of your choice, or one of five £20 runner-up prizes from a store of your choice. By telling us your views you'll be helping to improve our services.

If we haven't got a mobile number for you, and you want to take part in the survey, send an email to **tenant.survey@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk** and we will send you a copy of the survey.

Winter weather can affect your lives in lots of different ways

We're ready to face it, everything from flu jabs to flooding, but have you prepared too?

For loads of information to help you get ready, visit our dedicated winter weather pages on our website, **www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/winter**.

Our website contains information and advice on

- ❄️ travelling in winter
- ❄️ helping yourself and others
- ❄️ council services, like bin collections
- ❄️ school closures and getting to school
- ❄️ staying healthy and warm

A new start

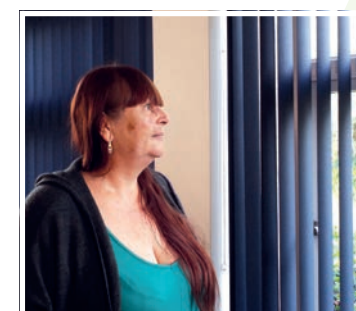
The Housing team are always looking to help reduce homelessness, and as a part of this duty, purchased a property in Dunstable which is now known as Franklin House.

Franklin House is a building which has been converted into 42 units to accommodate people who have found themselves homeless until they find more permanent accommodation. During their time at Franklin House, residents are given support to help complete forms, apply for benefits and get in contact with relevant services where required.

Many people find themselves homeless for many different reasons. Here are the stories of two of the residents of Franklin House:

Marina arrived at Franklin House earlier this year after ending up in hospital following tremendous family loss. During this period, she lost her job, was evicted from her home and found herself struggling to cope.

When she was ready to leave hospital, we were advised by the hospital team that Marina was due to be discharged and the next day, Marina was contacted by a member of the Housing Options team.



Marina said: "Holly went above and beyond to make me feel comfortable and assured me that I would be housed, as I had nowhere else to go."

It was then that she was told about Franklin House. As she had never been homeless before, she was

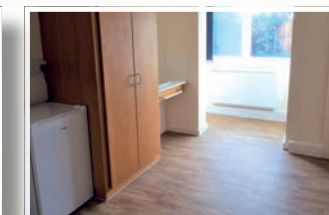
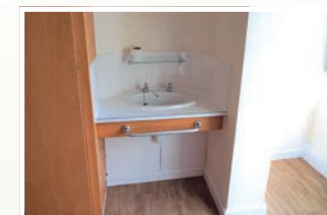
worried about going into temporary accommodation and did not know what to expect. She said "when I was shown the room that was going to be mine, I was stunned almost to tears."

"Moving in and having support from the team was stunning and incredible. I was very vulnerable when I moved in from hospital, especially as this was a new area to me, but the staff did everything they could to help me.

"Franklin House is well run, clean and lovely. I received support with paperwork that I was not sure how to do, and have since received my PIP award. I was having a bad day one day, and the cleaner sat down with me, made me a coffee and made sure I was okay. I have received the support I needed to find a property and to live independently again, and have now found a lovely home."

Marina was at Franklin House for two months, and is now settled into her new home.

"I am looking at going back to work as a support worker for people with mental health issues. It is early yet, but I am looking forwards to a bright and positive future."



Billy came to Franklin House after being a rough sleeper. Following a breakdown with his family, he found himself homeless, sleeping on park benches in the snow. Originally applying for other accommodation, he was accepted at Franklin House, but he was not certain to begin with.

He said: "I have heard about temporary accommodation and was dreading what the place would be like. I thought it would be rough, with the building not looked after and the residents not kept in check. I believed it would be worse than the streets.

"When I first came into the building, I was surprised as it was not what I expected at all. The building is clean and in good repair, and all issues that come up are dealt with. It proved to me that not all temporary accommodation is what you might think it is.

"I was anxious about dealing with the paperwork, because I did not know what I should be doing, but the team at Franklin guided me with completing my forms, empowering me rather than taking over."

Billy is still at Franklin at time of writing, but he is bidding for a more permanent home. His aim is to get back to work as a teacher. We wish him well.

Dominic Horn, who manages Franklin House said: "It is a very rewarding role. We pick up clients at their worst, mentally and financially, and it is good to help our residents through the process to help enable a success."



If you would like some advice on how to help prevent homelessness, please check our website to find videos on homelessness and bidding for a new property, which will show you how to apply for and bid for housing from the council and other local housing providers.

Taking a well-earned rest!

After 14 years with the New Woodfield Green and Downside Residents Association, Tony Cootes has stood down to take a well-earned break.

During his time with the group, Tony has shown a passion to improve the community in which he lives, which he has proved by his involvement with community meetings, events, Dunstable in Bloom, and collaboration with other local communities.

There are too many achievements to note in one article. However, some of his achievements include: winning Dunstable in Bloom, hosting the Teddy Bears' Picnic in 2018, and the always popular festive Christmas meals, the one in 2017 which I was reliably informed to have been the most enjoyed yet.

At the coffee morning at St Augustine's church, many came along to see Tony and give him their best wishes, including Cllr Hegley, Cllr Ghent, Cllr Sparrow, Cllr Russell and the Mayor of Dunstable, Cllr John Kane. Alongside these were former councillors, mayors and, of course, his colleagues and friends from the resident's association.

"No-one will be able to fill his shoes," one of the members of the group said. "He knows all the contacts and has managed everything for years."

To thank him for his hard work and commitment, Tony was presented with a certificate and thank you by Brett Douglas on behalf of the housing service, who has worked with Tony since 2013. Tony was very happy and quipped: "That will look great on my blank wall!"



We are sure that everyone who knows Tony wishes him the very best for the future.

Mainly for Men Houghton Regis

As the title suggests, the group is open to all men (and women who may be accompanying a man!). Each session usually has a theme, often with a guest speaker, and always a chance to discuss topics with the rest of the group. Quizzes, board games, dominoes are always available.

When I visited it was quite a lively morning, with conversations ranging from decorating, to trees, motorbikes and cooking. "We like to share and chat with each other," one attendee said. "Some men find it difficult to make friends and chat."



The theme of this morning was Swap Day, a bit like a bring and buy without the need for money. The table had books, CD's, ties, a small lamp and other items that were taken by the

If you have a spare morning, and would like to meet like-minded people, why not join the monthly coffee morning group run by Houghton Regis Helpers at Red House Court, Clarkes Way, Houghton Regis.

members. Items not swapped will be donated to a raffle to help raise funds for Houghton Regis Helpers, who are a voluntary good neighbour scheme. The attendees also had the chance to decide ideas for 2019 meetings.

At present, the mornings are held on the first Wednesday of every month from 11am to 12.30pm at Red House Court in Houghton Regis. The venue is easy to get to, has access for wheelchairs, you will be welcomed with refreshments and good company, and it's free!

For more information on the coffee mornings, or to find out more about **Houghton Regis Helpers** and what they do, see their website: **www.houghtonregishelpers.co.uk**, email: **houghtonregishelpers@hotmail.co.uk**, or contact **07587 004514**.



Interviews with involved tenants

Malcolm

What is your name, and what panel do you belong to?

My name is Mal Miles and I am the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel.

What made you want to join a tenant panel and become an involved tenant?

I retired some ten years ago and at that time lived in sheltered accommodation and was invited to go along to a meeting which at that time was called STAG (Sheltered Tenants Action Group). I liked the things they got involved with, and as time moved on tenant panels changed and I put myself up for election and got on the panel, as well as dealing with the month to month challenges! I took on setting up events for STAG which I enjoyed immensely.

How long have you been volunteering as an involved tenant?

The time I have put in with panels goes back some eight years now and I do not know where that time has gone.

What kind of things do you talk about at the meetings?

Back in the early panels (ie STAG) we represented the tenants if they had an issue with the council and could not resolve it themselves, the panel would act to try and resolve it. I have to say the success rate was good - things ranged from repairs, new lighting, disability access, voids, to name but a few. Over time the council staff began to understand what STAG was there for and we developed a very good relationship working together.

The present panel, of which I am Chair, has a much more in-depth involvement, scrutinising council policies, and we have spent up to a year looking at some projects. This involves talking to council staff up to Heads of Departments, and using surveys or dealing with new legislation.

Do you feel as though you make a difference?

Yes. I think we as involved tenants have made big strides in making a difference, because we can tell the council what to do. When we work on a project, we then make recommendations to the council and they take them on board.

What is the best thing you and your group have achieved?

I feel the best things that have come from being an involved tenant is understanding how the council works. Basically to most tenants they are a Landlord who we pay rent to for a property, but the complexities behind all of that are enormous, and I have and am still enjoying being an involved tenant.

What do you find the greatest challenge about being an involved tenant?

The greatest challenge for me is to work with like-minded tenants and to have built a working relationship with the council. This has taken a lot of time and effort from both sides and the rewards are great when we see the recommendations taken on board.

What is the best thing about being an involved tenant?

Being an involved tenant means you are volunteering and you are committing yourself, with other tenants who bring different skills to the table, and then work as a team with the council.

What do you need to become an involved tenant and is it easy to join?

The best thing about being an involved tenant is working with a group of people and finding ways of how we can improve the working relationship between the council as a landlord and tenants.

What would you say to anyone who was thinking about joining a tenant panel?

If someone was thinking about joining any of the groups it's a commitment you are making which involves meetings (from a weekly or monthly, or even bi-monthly, depending on the group you join). I know that you would be most welcome.

Beverley

What is your name, and what panel do you belong to?

Beverley Drummey. I'm a member of the Way Forward Panel

What made you want to join a tenant panel and become an involved tenant?

I had some issues and sadly they were not being sorted and I really didn't want others to go through the same as me.

How long have you been volunteering as an involved tenant?

I have been an involved tenant for about 10 years.

What kind of things do you talk about at the meetings?

We talk about a number of issues and the council bring things to us to discuss. We also have ideas that we talk through then take to the council.

Do you feel as though you make a difference?

I hope we do.

What is the best thing you and your group have achieved?

There have been many things that we have achieved - PIR lights in communal areas for one.

What do you find the greatest challenge about being an involved tenant?

I don't find being An Involved Tenant challenging - I enjoy what we do!

What is the best thing about being an involved tenant?

I'm proud of all the things we have achieved as a group, from policies and procedures to introductory tenancies.

What do you need to become an involved tenant and is it easy to join?

Anyone can be an Involved Tenant - all you have to do is get in touch with Brett Douglas.

What would you say to anyone who was thinking about joining a tenant panel?

If you feel you can help shape the service we all partake in, come along and get involved. If you have a spare couple of hours once a month come along and join us.

The New Lettings Service

My name is Christine. My colleague Haroon and I joined the Lettings Service when it was launched last December. It has been almost a year and we would like to share our journey and what we do.



When the Lettings Service was launched its main aim was, and remains, “to increase the pool of properties; to provide suitable and affordable homes, supporting the prevention of homelessness”.

Many of our tenants get housing benefit and need help in starting out on the private rental market. We support this by finding and signing up private landlords, who want their properties managed without hassle. A benefit is that these properties will meet our criteria and standards. As these are properties within the private sector, the rules are slightly different to those in social housing.

Renting a private property through us means that you will sign a 12-month, assured short-hold tenancy agreement, with the potential to renew if the landlord agrees and you have abided by the requirements of the tenancy agreement.

As a tenant in one of our properties you can expect:

- no fees
- competitive rents
- support during the tenancy to ensure you continue to have a home
- us to deal with the landlord and manage the tenancy
- being on housing benefit or on a low income not to be a barrier to renting from us

Rents for these properties are lower than the rate charged at local lettings agencies on the high street.

The properties we have on offer range from studio apartments to large houses, mainly located across Central Bedfordshire.

We work closely with other council teams and agencies which may help you sustain your tenancy should things not go as smoothly as anticipated.

So far, we have housed 39 families and one individual, each of whom were either in temporary accommodation, or had been served an eviction notice from the landlord and were looking for somewhere else to live.

Here are some case study examples, which I hope will illustrate the impact we have on the tenants we help.

The sofa hopper

As the result of a relationship ending, V had to sell the shared property and find somewhere to live. Despite her efforts she was unable to rent privately or have a mortgage because checks confirmed she had a CCJ, acquired because of previous mortgage arrears and she was not eligible for social housing. As a result of her situation, she and her children slept on the sofas of friends and family, relying on their goodwill,

when all V wanted was a chance to live somewhere with her children so they could have a new start.

As a service, we understand that life happens and sometimes you need another chance. After checking she had the funds to pay the rent, we were happy to offer her a property. V was one of our earliest tenants and always pays her rent on time.

Landlord - rent hiker

Our next story is of a young couple with two children who were paying their rent each month on time, every time. They received notification from their landlord that there would be a rent increase. However, the increase was so high that they started to go into arrears.

“We didn’t know what to do. We were with this landlord for two years with no complaints.”

After approaching Housing Options they were placed into Temporary Accommodation. As not eligible for social housing, the Lettings Service discussed their situation and sourced a property to consider. After viewing the house, they accepted it on the spot. They are wonderful tenants who are so grateful for having a property to rent at a cost they can afford.

“We can’t thank the lettings service enough for giving us a chance.”

Single mum in temporary accommodation

The next story is about a single mother who found herself in a tricky situation after splitting up with her partner, leaving her and her newborn baby in Temporary Accommodation.

The Lettings Service completed a viewing for one of the properties we had on our books, and the tenant accepted the property almost immediately.

Prior to checking in any tenant, we reiterate the main rules which are to keep up with your rent payments and no anti-social behaviour.

This tenant, in particular, has made sure she has not gone into any arrears throughout her tenancy and will always call the Lettings service if there is anything she is unsure of, or if any issues arise.

She is very thankful for the property she was offered, as the rent is affordable for her and she loves living in the area.

For more details on the service, please contact the team on **0300 300 8600**, or search for ‘about letting’ on our website.



Woodlands from the residents

Now that Woodlands, near Biggleswade, is open, I visited the site to meet the manager and some of the residents who are settling in. All of the residents were in high need for a permanent pitch as they were on roadside.

One lady said: *“I was on another site for 18 years. After that, I was staying with friends or living on the roadside, not having anywhere secure to stay. I am very happy with my plot. My grandchildren can come to see me, safely, and I won’t leave. It’s a quiet and peaceful place.”*

Another family who have moved on site also said how happy they were, and had already made the dayroom their home with beautiful flowers and a sofa they were re-covering themselves in tasteful cream.

Each plot is fenced and gated, allowing privacy and security, with a day room. The day rooms are modular buildings that are environmentally friendly, warm, separate, insulated, and offer the room for the residents to live in during the day. Those that I saw were clean, warm and welcoming.

The community is a new one, and all were friendly, welcoming and very pleased to feel safe and settled. All I met as we walked around smiled and waved, with some coming over for a chat.

Proud of what the team have achieved, the manager for the site said: *“We have built these plots, but there are still not enough for the people in need. Life is very tough for many on the roadside, who do not want to be there.”*

The future for the children on this site is also bright, with the Liaison Officer for the council organising schooling. It is also hoped that in the near future, we will be able to run workshops in literacy and maths in the site office for all who want to attend.



Is the size of your property causing you problems?

Making a decision to leave the family home is never easy.

If you’re an older person thinking about moving to a smaller property, but can’t face the disruption, why don’t you give us a call. We can help make it an easy and stress-free move for you.

By acting now, you could move to a property that will suit your future housing needs, have more money in your pocket and more time to enjoy yourself.

There are lots of things that we could do to help you make the move – from helping you pack and unpack, to sorting out all the paperwork and arrangements, and putting up the curtains in your new home.



Your home could be a place of rest, not a place of work

An incentive scheme for older tenants looking to move to a smaller home

A great place to live and work.

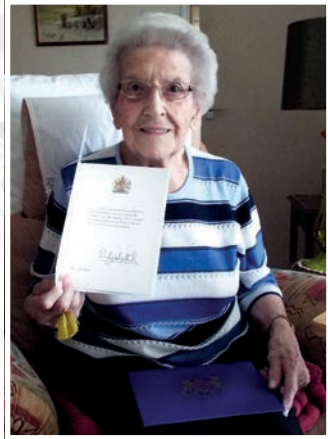
Find us online www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

If you’d like to find out more about the sort of help we can give you, give us a call on **0300 300 8302** or email rightsizing@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

We can give you lots of information and advice, and we can also arrange for you to visit one of our Independent Living Schemes and have a coffee and a chat with an officer there.

You can also watch this video to find out more about moving to an Independent Living Scheme. <https://youtu.be/XpJeWWouXB0>

“I watched Gale Court being built!”



When you reach your 101st birthday, you have certainly witnessed a few events.

One of our tenants, who was born in 1917, kindly agreed to share some of her experiences.

Barton born and bred, Kit was born during the first world war in a property opposite the Plough pub. With seven siblings, she shared the two-bedroomed house with their parents. One of the most notable homes that they lived in is a thatched cottage that remains today, tucked away in the middle of an estate. Before they moved in, the cottage was a plaiting school, tied into the once thriving hat trade that dominated this area.



When Kit lived there, one half of the property was used by her grandfather, whilst the rest of them lived in the other side. Although not that long ago, their toilet was two holes in the ground covered by corrugated iron. “We used to go together with a candle,” Kit said, smiling. “We didn’t worry about sharing.” She added: “When the holes were full, my grandad had to dig them out and bury the waste in the garden.”

At 14, in 1931, Kit left school to work as a milliner in Luton. “My dad used to come past in the horse and cart. I was so pleased to see him I used to call out and he would throw me a coin to buy lunch.”

When married, Kit and her first husband moved into a beautiful thatched cottage along Mill Lane. “The rent was six shillings a week,” Kit told me with a laugh. Two shillings, or a florin, was the equivalent of 10 pence in decimal money, making the rent a spectacular £1.30 a month. The house is still there today.

Sadly, Kit’s first husband was lost in the second world war, leaving her with a young son. His name appears on a memorial in Singapore where he was shot. “The war office didn’t know what had happened to him. He was reported as missing in action, but a man who lived in Barton and knew of us saw him shot. I had to tell the office myself.”

Some years later, Kit met her new husband, and together they ran the newsagents in Barton. “It was hard work. I had to get up early to sort the newspaper rounds out.”

For a few years, Kit and her family moved away from Barton to Stondon and Meppershall, where they used to own a grocery shop and then a Post Office. “I didn’t want to run a Post Office, but one day my husband asked me to go and help him with the post. I agreed, but only to work out the back as I didn’t want to be on the counter. However, one day I had to get a stamp from the book behind the counter, when I was asked for four stamps by a customer, and from that day on I stayed out there and really enjoyed meeting everyone.”



Eventually, they moved back to Barton, to live in Sharpenhoe Road, where Kit remained for many years after her husband passed away. However, the stairs became difficult to climb and the property was always cold. “My husband used to say, ‘I’m off to have a wash. If you don’t get pneumonia in this house, you won’t get it anywhere!’”

It was then that she considered a property at Gale Court, Barton. “My husband and I watched it being built, and he always said to me that if anything happened to him, I should get my name down for one.”



With some help from family members and the housing team, she eventually was successful and moved into the apartment she is in now. It has one bedroom, a level access shower and is lovely and warm.

“I can’t complain about the service and support I get from the council. I never thought I would be living here, and have never regretted moving to Gale Court. I have liked all of the officers who have worked here. I like people.”

Kit has lived at Gale Court for 13 years after moving in at 88 years old. She has friends about the block, including a lady she met decades ago, and of course, she has received her telegram from the Queen. “It is a lovely photo of the Queen,” Kit said, smiling as she always does. “I will be 102 in January, but I don’t feel old, I really don’t!”

We at the housing team would all like to wish Kit a very happy 102nd birthday.

If you would like more information on our housing schemes for the over 55’s, please type ‘what is supported’ into the search box on our website or call **0300 300 8302** for more details.



BRA and DTC Cup Cake Morning in aid of Dementia Awareness



The Beecroft Residents Association got together with Dunstable Town Council again to hold a coffee morning at the Beecroft Community Centre in Dunstable. Many local residents and coffee morning regulars attended the event, which was held in aid of Dementia Awareness.



Along with the cakes, there was a hand massage for a small donation and a raffle, with the items kindly donated by the Beecroft Residents Association, Caddington Grove and two coffee morning regulars. One group did very well on the raffle, including a beautiful bunch of flowers. The ladies, who also go to the local church, said they often join in on local events to support the church and share news with their community.

For some of the attendees, this was the first coffee morning they had attended. One lady said when asked if she would attend another: "Yes, definitely!"

Another couple, both council tenants in their late 80s and early 90s, said they had not been out for over two weeks.

Although it took them 20 minutes to get to the event, they both enjoyed meeting people they recognised. The gentleman said: "it is really good to meet with friends from our local area."



In total the event raised £116.44 for the Dementia Awareness Charity, and was an enjoyable morning for all.

If you would be interested in joining the **Beecroft Residents Association**, contact **Sue** on **07847 381960**.

Meetings are bi-monthly and held in the Community Centre in Westfield Road.

They start at 8.00pm on the last Thursday of the month, and our first meeting of the year is always in January.



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!

Don't forget your gas safety check!



As a landlord, the council has a legal obligation to ensure all gas and fossil fuel appliances are checked and serviced yearly. Carrying out these checks significantly reduces the risk of your appliance producing harmful carbon monoxide.

When you receive your appointment letter, it's important to keep your appointment, or contact Sunrealm to rearrange.

Keep your family, neighbours and yourself safe. Make time for your annual safety check.



A bench for Bidwell



During a site visit, and after speaking to some of the residents of Bidwell Close, the Community Support team identified that the residents no longer had an outside seat. The bench that was there was in poor condition and needed replacing.

The senior for the team, Julie, said: "The residents all previously used it and it was a shame they could no longer sit outside to chat with their neighbours."

Julie and Mary Goodson, who work with supported tenants, met with Bidwell Close residents, and between them agreed that we would replace the bench with a new one.

Sian, who works with the mini-groups, liaised with the contractors who levelled the ground to make the area suitable for a new bench. The residents are very happy and using it already.

Julie remarked: "Sian works tirelessly to make sure all the gardens are properly looked after, and is an asset to the team."



Housing Services employment support this year

The Housing Employment Officer within Housing Services is often passed referrals from other colleagues to help tenants move closer to employment.

Very often we find that many of the tenants referred have become socially isolated but as they progress through our training courses and employment support programmes we see their confidence growing and many friendships flourish.

During 2018, we delivered a number of Job Fairs and employment related training courses, primarily across Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Houghton Regis. Our seven Job Fairs were attended by a fantastic 843 people, who had the opportunity to visit 137 information stands provided by local employers and training organisations.

Alongside that:

- 42 tenants have received training in Food Hygiene or First Aid, helping to increase their self-confidence, enhance their CVs and obtain a Level 2 qualification.
- 29 tenants attended our 'Inspire' employability series of workshops, with 85 per cent of those attending moving into employment, volunteering or taking further training courses.
- As a direct result of the employment support offered by the team, feedback from employers suggests that 267 have either got jobs or have had further contact with the local employers taking part in our events.

Our successes are regularly promoted in Housing Matters.

"Thank you for a wonderful course!"
A tenant from the 'Inspire work shops'

"Thanks for your support. I have found the course to be a positive experience and it has given me a real boost taking part. It's brilliant seeing people realising they are worthy and growing in confidence."

A tenant from the 'Inspire work shops'

"I would like to inform you that I had a wonderful experience during the course. Janet was excellent. Co-students were brilliant. I really had a wonderful team experience. Thank you so much!"

A tenant on the Food Hygiene course

"The Food Hygiene course is amazing. I have learnt so much and met some really lovely people who I am looking forward to seeing on the Inspire programme."

A tenant on the Food Hygiene course

"The food course today was again excellent. I have enjoyed going over topics I have been made aware of previously, so an excellent top-up of information, a good thing to add to the CV, and I can certainly say some friendships have been made already along the way! Looking forward to tomorrow!"

A tenant on the Food Hygiene course

If you are interested in finding out about any future courses we may be delivering or need help to move into employment please contact us on **tenantinvolvement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**

Our next Job Fairs in 2019

27th February 10.30 to 12.30
Dunstable Methodist Church halls, LU6 3SN

13th March 1.30 to 3.00
Downside Children's centre, Dunstable LU5 4AS

Independent Living... by Sinead Maguire

As Independent Living Officers, we offer a housing support service across Central Bedfordshire. We help vulnerable customers at risk of homelessness, who require targeted support to help keep their current home, or support to move to alternative accommodation.

Working alongside our customers, we empower them to remain independent in their accommodation, and work to prevent homelessness. We make sure customers have a clear route through the service towards a positive future, developing independence in their community (and in turn cutting down pressure on our housing and social care services).

We also offer an outreach service and support via drop-in sessions, where we often see lots of customers looking for housing, benefits and advice about letters.

A typical week for me

I have four drop-ins in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable. On average, I see about ten customers each session and provide support on housing-related needs.

I also manage a caseload that includes working with customers who have been placed in temporary accommodation, or who are at risk of becoming homeless. I will have several professional meetings arranged in support of the customers to make sure I point them to the right agencies in a timely way, and daily I work alongside my colleagues across the whole council to achieve a good outcome for our customers.

As an Independent Living Prevention Officer, I am part of a team that manages the Local Welfare Benefits applications and associated duties.

Yes, it's busy! Do I enjoy my job? YES!

Why Every day is challenging and unknown, the difference you can make to a person/family can be positive and life changing.

Why The team is great, they help me achieve and I, in turn, help them. We are focussed on our customers and share our achievements. This is so empowering.

Why The feedback from customers on our service is so positive.

Why Appreciation of how life can be impacted by unforeseen circumstances and how positive partnership working can turn lives around.



To access the drop-in service, please check the website to find out dates and locations on www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk, or call **0300 300 6745** for more advice.

dates for your diary

January

The Town Mayors Quiz Night

Friday 25 January 2019 – 7pm

St Vincent's Social Centre, Houghton Regis

February

Coffee Morning for over 55's

Thursday 14 February 2019

United Services Club, High Street South, Dunstable
(check website for details)

Work to start soon on landmark development in Houghton Regis

The project has been called Houghton Regis Central up until now, but we will soon announce a permanent name, suggested and chosen by the local community.

The building has a public restaurant, bar and café, shops and health and beauty treatment rooms, alongside 168 independent living apartments for over 55s.

Work starts in February 2019.

You can sign up for emails about the project by visiting

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/houghton-regis-central

We are excited about progress on Houghton Regis Central, which will be a landmark development at the heart of Houghton Regis.



Hope for the future...

As a social landlord, we at the housing team support many of our tenant customers in many different ways. One such team are the Young Person's team under Independent Living, who are supporting one of the first group of asylum seeker children who moved into one of our properties two years ago.



Three 16 year olds moved into the property from a unit where they had 24-hour supervision and care, due to their young age. However, as with all children, they need to move on and learn to live independently. One of the three children, now a young man, came to our area from Bedford, not knowing anyone or where anything was. The very first night, he was by himself as his friends joined him the next day.

"It was big and exciting, but I didn't know anything," he said about moving in to his new home. "I had some shopping to do, but didn't know where the shops were and found it difficult to communicate to begin. We all used to get lost."

Margaret Woollorton, who works in the team said: "These young people don't even know how to work a hob or microwave to cook their food."

The team give them support on basic life skills, as well as budgeting, cleaning, education and work. They also educate them to respect their neighbours and the local community, supporting them with the cultural differences when they first arrive.

"It's like a family here," the young person said. "We have supported each other, and Margaret and Martin are always there to give us their support. They do lots of good things for us, and I would not be in my position now without their support."

After attending school for six months, our young person started college where he is studying motor mechanics, something he is really interested in. Margaret also helped him to find some volunteering work, as he told her that he was at college three days a week and was getting bored the rest of the time. During the summer months, he got a summer job at a local firm so that he could earn his own money before he went back to college, and has attended a Jobs Fair that is organised by the housing service.

To add to his achievements, he won an award at college for his results, participation and attendance, which he is very pleased about, especially as he wants to teach others.

"I feel that I have the support I need to achieve what I want to do."

Margaret added: "This young man has worked really hard to be where he is and we are all proud of him. He remains very polite towards staff and always finds ways to learn new skills."

Despite his award, when asked what his greatest achievement was, he said: "Going for surgery at the hospital." This is an incident Margaret remembers well, as he was worried about the procedure, and knowing this, she stayed with him all day, only leaving when told to by the hospital. "I was so worried, I couldn't eat. I just kept thinking, his mother doesn't even know that he is here, having surgery. It was an emotional time."

Later that night, Margaret recalls how he called her to say that he was fine and that she could eat now. "I was so relieved."

These young people have a bright future now, but they will always remember those left behind. "Margaret and Martin helped me by making a referral to the British Red Cross family tracing service." This young man, who had not seen the rest of his family since he was 12 said: "I wanted to find out if they were okay, and I found out that my brother is in Kent, and that my mother and sister are currently safe, even though they will have to move on. I managed to speak with my mother, and she was really happy that my brother and I were safe at last." He added. "My aim is to make sure that my mother and sister are as safe as I feel now. My brother and I are saving money so that we can help them, and hopefully we can be together again one day."

From a dangerous and sometimes tragic past, these children have grown into young men with visions for their future, made possible by not only the help and support of their workers, but by their strength and determination to survive and progress. I am certain they will succeed in their visions.

what to do

Know what is 'nuisance' and what is 'anti-social' behaviour

When you feel you are experiencing unreasonable behaviour from your neighbours and other residents, do you know what you can do?

Who can you contact, and what is anti-social behaviour?

To find out more, watch our video, by following the link below.
<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/housing/>

Performance Update

How are we doing?	Results for Aug-Oct 2018	Target for 2018/19	
Repairs completed on time	95.7%	90%	↑
Satisfaction with repairs	95.6%	90%	↑
Sign up to the Tenants App	648	No target	
Actions on Tenants App	76	No target	

Your fire safety

As your landlord, the council has responsibilities for making sure that the structure of buildings and communal areas within them meet fire and safety requirements.



Check your smoke alarm

Make sure that you check your smoke alarm **weekly** – it could save your life!

If it is not working please report immediately on **Direct Dial: 0800 074 0263 (opt 3)**

Fire Safety in Communal blocks

If you live in a flat, we operate a "Stay Put Policy". Each flat in our blocks is built to withstand fire for 30 to 60 minutes. This allows enough time for the fire brigade to arrive and assess the extent of the fire, and whether the block must be evacuated.

If there is a fire in your home:

- ✓ Alert any other people in the flat.
- ✓ Leave the room at once and close the door to prevent smoke and fire spreading.
- ✓ Don't tackle the fire yourself unless it is safe to do so.
- ✓ Leave the flat calmly, and when everyone is out, close the front door to prevent smoke and fire spreading.
- ✓ Leave your block using the emergency exit and do not use the lift.
- ✓ Call the fire brigade on 999 – it's free from any telephone. Give the operator your address including the number of your flat, and tell them which floor the fire is on.
- ✓ Make yourself known to the fire brigade as soon as possible.

If there is a fire in your building:

- ✓ Stay inside your flat if you don't know where the fire is.
- ✓ Close your front door and your windows to prevent smoke entering your home.
- ✓ Listen for instructions from the fire brigade.
- ✓ The fire brigade will guide you to a safe location, if they think you should evacuate your home.
- ✓ If you feel threatened by fire or smoke and it is safe to leave your flat, leave the building via the emergency exit, closing your front door behind you.
- ✓ If there is a fire in your building, if you feel threatened by fire or smoke, or your flat is affected by fire or smoke – you should leave the building if it is safe to do so.

Stay in your home if you are not directly affected by the fire, otherwise you may be putting yourself and your household at risk from smoke. Wait for advice and direction from the fire brigade that is dealing with the incident.

Communal areas need to be kept clear

To protect our residents, we are now enforcing a clear corridor policy in regards to items being left or stored within all communal areas.

From now, tenants will not be able to use communal areas for storing your possessions, placing unwanted goods or adding decorative items outside your front door. If you live in a flat and have a brick-built external storage shed that needs repairing, call the repairs hotline on 0800 074 0263.

Items we can't allow:

- Pushchairs
- Bikes
- Shopping trolleys
- Shoes
- Mobility scooters
- Door mats
- Plants
- Pictures
- Rubbish
- Any other items e.g. furniture



Why are we acting now?

Following information received regarding a serious incident in the last six months within another Housing Association which resulted in a number of deaths. The Health and Safety Fire Risk assessment following the incident showed that items left in communal areas had contributed to the risk both in stopping people escaping and creating thick toxic smoke.

We do appreciate that we have previously allowed you to store things like pushchairs, scooters and bicycles under stairwells. However, we are afraid we cannot let that continue. We fully understand the frustration this may cause, but must enforce this condition to keep you safe.



CaféConnect Leighton Buzzard

Sometimes we all need a place to go for a hot drink and biscuits, and to talk with others. Community Action Bedfordshire, in association with Noah, run a Café Connect group in Leighton Buzzard where everyone is welcome.

They are a mixed group of men and women, from school leavers to pensioners, who meet to chat and hear about social events in the area. Gina, who organises this event, tells the attendees about activities she is organising, such as a local walk around the greens to encourage social activity. Other members of the groups share activities and events so there is plenty for all to do if they wish.

Everyone was very welcoming, made me feel comfortable, and the time went really quickly.

One of the attendees, who lives in a nearby flat rented from housing, said: "I've lived in a council flat for 14 years. I love it there. It's really close to town and I always attend these groups."

The conversations were wide, varied, and throughout it all, Gina was there to offer advice and support.

The group is held every Thursday afternoon at the **TACTIC Centre, 17 Hockliffe Street, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1HD**. So, if you want a coffee and a chat, pop along, you will be warmly welcomed.

If you would like more information on **CafeConnect** in Leighton Buzzard, contact **Gina** on **07825 665038**, or email: **cafeconnect@cabeds.org.uk**

Did you know?

That CafeConnect runs in other areas too.

Dunstable: Every Thursday between 1 and 3pm at @Grove Corner, 76a High Street North, Dunstable, LU6 1LE

Houghton Regis: every Wednesday between 1 and 3 at Jewel Café, 6 Bedford Square, Houghton Regis, LU5 5ES

Caddington: every Friday between 12 and 3pm at Collings Well Hall, Chaul End Road, Caddington, LU1 4AS

For details on these, contact Priya on 07814 704203.



Improving our service repairs

In August 2017, we changed the contract with our repairs provider (Jeakins Weir) from a traditional contractor/client relationship to a partnering arrangement. This means we are working along a single process, to stop doubling up on work and to find ways to improve the service offered to our customers.

So far, the advantages are:

- Jeakins Weir and Housing Services share responsibility for cost control (share risk/reward) saving us money.
- We have more influence over day-to-day management of the contract.
- We have taken charge of how we interact with you, our customers.
- Potential for greater investment in staff training, to help provide a better service.
- Better value for money.

We now use the same system, which is more efficient and has greater transparency. This enables us to intervene in problems that arise at the earliest opportunity, meaning repairs are completed earlier.

This new way of working has resulted in less cost and an improved service:

- Time to complete urgent responsive repairs reduced by 75 per cent and routine by 63 per cent in the last 12 months.
- 11 per cent increased satisfaction with responsive repairs.
- 15.3 per cent increase in repair completed on time.

It is still early days and still room for improvement, but this is a really positive step in the right direction.

LIFELINE EMERGENCY Alarm Service

Helping you to live safely and independently at home

- ✓ For reassurance that help is just a button press away
- ✓ 24 hours a day, seven days a week

For a free no-obligation demonstration or more information on the emergency alarm service

0300 300 8146 / 5739 / 4101

Lifeline@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Could an apprenticeship be right up your street?

The Academy

Supporting your Career

Apprenticeships aren't just for school leavers, completing one could be your passport back into the work place.

Apprentices do a real job in a real workplace and get paid for it! An apprenticeship will help you to gain job specific skills, enable you to re-train, improve your confidence and enhance your job prospects. In one of our recent editions we

heard from Rebecca, a former apprentice who's now enjoying a great career with us. Rebecca said: *"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."*

Helping us to deliver great services to our residents and businesses, our apprentices are incredibly valued as employees and receive great rates of pay and other employee benefits.

Perhaps now's the time for you to consider an apprenticeship?



Visit our website to view our current vacancies

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/jobs

where you can register for job alerts to avoid missing out on any future opportunities.

To find out more about our apprenticeships visit

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/jobs/other/apprenticeships.aspx,

or email apprenticeshipenquiry@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Find your greatness

- work at Central Bedfordshire Council

Myth buster

Myth:

Apprentices are on low pay

Busted: The government sets national minimum wage rates, this is the same for apprentices but many companies, including Central Bedfordshire Council, pay more. Our Level 2 apprentices earn £14,298 per annum and our Level 3s earn £16,394!

Myth buster:

Myth:

Apprenticeships are just for school leavers

Busted: Absolutely not! Perhaps your children have started school, you've been caring for a relative or neighbour, maybe you've been out of work for a while and are looking for your next big break, apprenticeships are a great opportunity to apply your learning on the job.

On a lighter note...



"I have a very good feeling about my job interview today. The manager said they were looking for somebody responsible..."

"You've found your person," I responded.
"Whenever there was a problem in my last job they always said that I was responsible!"

What kind of monkey can fly?

.....a hot air baboon!

Kindly provided by Sue Hoube, Beecroft Residents Association

Get in touch

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

www.facebook.com/letstalkcentral

[@letstalkcentral](https://twitter.com/letstalkcentral)

[@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

0300 300 8302

Central Bedfordshire Council,
Watling House, High Street North,
Dunstable, LU6 1LF



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When finished with, please put me in your recycling bin or bag.

Find out more

For more information about this publication, further copies, or a large print copy, get in touch.

Central Bedfordshire