

JANUARY 2023

TENANT NEWS

In this issue:

**THE RESULTS OF
TENANT NEWS
SURVEY**

**SEND US YOUR
PHOTOS**

**KEEPING YOU AND
YOUR HOME SAFE
AND WARM**

...and lots more!

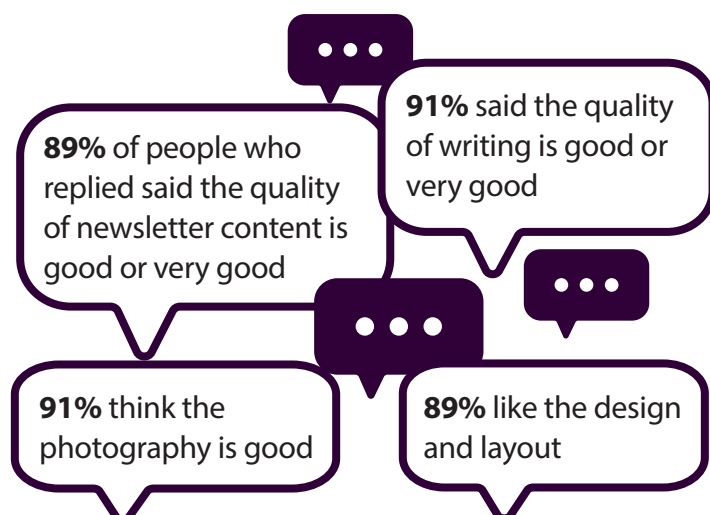


**RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT PANEL
APPROVED** 

What you told us in our Tenant News survey

Thank you to everyone who filled in the survey in a previous issue of the newsletter. The feedback we received was largely very positive, but we're always looking to improve.

You said...



We will...

- work with our Tenant Communications Sub-group of the Resident Engagement Panel to suggest ideas for future newsletters and review the content to make sure it's easily understandable. This group will also review the look and feel of each issue. All newsletters will be approved by the group before they're sent out
- invite tenants to send us photos we can use in future editions of the newsletter - you can read more about this below

Calling all avid photographers

Do you love taking photos in your spare time?

Maybe you have a view from your window or an image of your community that you'd like to share. We'd love to see your photos and we may use them in future publications.

Send your photos (no larger than 5MB) along with your name and where the photo was taken to getinvolved@canterbury.gov.uk or by phone on **01227 862 000**.

If we share your photo, we will give credit to you. For example, 'photo by Sarah from Herne Bay'.

By sending us your photos you are consenting to us using them in future publications.



Become a Community Champion

Community Champions are people who:

- care about their neighbourhood and want it to be safe, clean and friendly
- want to make a positive difference
- want to work with us to spot the most important issues in their area

Now your Neighbourhood Management Officers and their areas have been confirmed, we'll be involving Community Champions in estate walks and neighbourhood days.

The estate walk means tenants can meet council officers, ward councillors and other agencies to discuss any issues they may have.

Neighbourhood days are community events to tackle key issues such as community clean ups.

How much of my time will it take?

We expect them to be around twice a year, with each one taking a few hours. They are flexible and it's up to you to decide how much of an active role you'd like to play.

We'd love to hear from you if you're a tenant who is passionate about improving the service we provide.

For an informal conversation about this role and more details on how to become a Community Champion, please email getinvolved@canterbury.gov.uk with your name, address and telephone number. We'll be in touch to discuss things with you further!

Tenancy fraud

There are around 98,000 council or housing association homes in England occupied by someone who shouldn't be living there.

This can be a result of tenancy fraud which is illegal and includes:

- sub-letting or giving up a property to someone else without the council's permission
- leaving the property empty and not telling the council you have left
- passing on the keys to someone else for a one-off payment
- obtaining the property by deception by not telling us your full, correct details and personal circumstances when applying for social housing
- wrongly claiming succession rights by trying to take over the tenancy when you are not entitled to

The maximum penalty for housing fraud is up to two years in prison and a fine of up to £50,000.

There is not enough social housing to meet the needs of people who genuinely need it. We have to make sure our homes go to those who are legally entitled to them. People waiting for social housing will have an even longer wait if homes are occupied by those who have no right to be there.

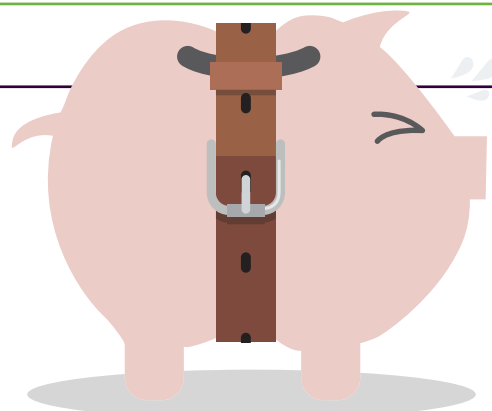
If you think somebody may be committing tenancy fraud, you can report it to us anonymously at generaltenancyenquiries@canterbury.gov.uk or by phone on **01227 862 142**.

Help with cost of living

We know the cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on residents.

We've put together lots of information on the help and support you can get with food, health and wellbeing and money advice. You can read this online at [canterbury.gov.uk/costofliving](https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/costofliving).

Please take a look and share this with friends and family.



Parking on grassed communal areas

Did you know parking on grassed areas outside your home is a breach of your tenancy agreement?



We're receiving reports of people parking their cars on communal grass on many estates across the district. This is churning up the grass and making the area look damaged and unattractive.

You are allowed to park on the road but driving over a pavement to park in front of your home on the grassed areas is not allowed.

Driving over communal land is also a serious concern when it comes to the safety of children and others walking across the land.

We can take tenancy or legal action against anyone found to be doing this or we can suggest double yellow lines on the road. You may then lose the right to park on the road near your homes and if double yellow lines are introduced, this could result in a parking ticket being issued.

Communal grassed areas will be looked at as part of estate inspections. If you are found to have damaged the grass you may be charged for the cost of putting it right.

Dirt bikes and quads are not permitted on housing land. If tenants, their children or their visitors are causing this behaviour, we may take tenancy action against you and charge you for any damage caused.

To report any issues with regards to parking or the bikes, please email neighbourhoodmanagement@canterbury.gov.uk

A new life for garages

Things are looking up for residents who want to rent a council garage. The council will be reopening the waiting list and looking for potential garage tenants.



For the past few years, no garages have been let. In February councillors agreed a plan to reopen the waiting lists and relet those garages that are in the best state of repair.

Extra rental income will be spent to spruce up garages in poorer condition and relet them too.

This is a gradual process and it will take some time before we can deal with all garage blocks.

The council has to maximise rental income by adopting a more commercial approach to garage rent levels. It now compares garage rents in Canterbury against neighbouring local authorities, local private garage landlords and self-storage companies.

The rent for a standard council garage in 2022/23 is only £11 per week and £13.55 per week in Crown Gardens. We are considering increasing the weekly rent of a standard garage to £12.22 per week, and in Crown Gardens to £15.05 per week from April 2023. These rents apply to all residents, but the council has to charge non-council housing tenants VAT on top of the rent.

This proposed increase will put our garage rents on a par with other councils in east Kent and is still a lot cheaper than renting most private garages in the district.

It's going to take a lot of time and effort to make this plan work, but we are aiming to make it a success and will keep you posted on progress.

KEEPING YOU AND YOUR HOME SAFE AND WARM

We understand how important it is to feel safe, warm and comfortable at home. Keeping warm can prevent colds, flu and more serious health problems.

Things you can do:

- keep warm by setting your heating to the right temperature which is a recommended minimum of 18°C or 65°F, and by staying as active as possible
- have regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day
- try to remove clutter and other trip hazards like rugs and trailing wires
- have your heating and cooking appliances, plus all electrical equipment, checked regularly
- make sure there is enough light to see
- if you use a hot water bottle, make sure you follow the manufacturer's safety advice to avoid the risk of accidents and scolding from leaks or bursts

Warmer air holds more moisture than cooler air. Keeping a constant temperature in your home will reduce the condensation and therefore the risk of damp and mould.

Reporting repairs and maintenance

We work with different types of contractors to do jobs on our behalf:

Household repairs

If you have a general repair within your flat, such as a broken window or door, please contact Mears by calling freephone **0800 313 4740**.

Gas, hot water or heating repairs

If you have a problem with your heating or plumbing:

- If your home has its own boiler, please contact Gas Call by calling freephone **0800 012 9958**
- If you live in a block with a communal boiler and the problem is with the boiler, please call Thermoserv on **0208 681 7330** and press option 1
- If you live in a block with a communal boiler and the problem is inside your home, such as a faulty radiator, please call Gas Call on freephone **0800 012 9958**

Grounds maintenance

If you need to report any issues with grass cutting or general grounds maintenance please contact Canenco on **01227 947 860**.

Testing your smoke alarm

Having a working and correctly positioned smoke alarm in your home can save your life. Your smoke alarm should be mains powered with a backup battery.

Follow these simple checks to test your smoke alarm every week:

- press the test button until the alarm sounds. If it doesn't sound, try cleaning it and changing the battery and test again
- arrange for the battery to be safely replaced
- if the smoke alarm starts to beep regularly, the battery needs to be changed straight away
- if you have a smoke alarm that doesn't have batteries and it isn't working, please report it to **repairs@canterbury.gov.uk** or call freephone **0800 313 4740**.





Our Homes for Ukraine team

Homes for Ukraine

The Homes for Ukraine scheme allows people to give up spare rooms to house refugees they don't know for at least six months. Many are hosting them for at least a year.

Council tenants who want to host Ukrainian refugees need written permission from the council as landlord before deciding to take part. This is to make sure that they are not overcrowding your home.

Our team has been working incredibly closely with Kent County Council and other district and borough councils to make sure Ukrainian guests are getting as much support as possible.

By the end of November, more than 187 people had offered to host Ukrainian guests and a total of 444 people, including 98 children have been hosted in our district.

If you have a spare room and are interested in taking part in the scheme, you can find out more online at canterbury.gov.uk/ukraine, where you can also fill in our form applying to take part.

Introducing Expression Arts

Expression Arts is creatively connecting communities in the district.

Expression Arts is working with Canterbury City Council and its Independent Living Managers to develop and provide opportunities in the community. The aim is to ensure more people get out of their homes, feel less lonely and and take part in more social activities.

Over the past year, it has:

- recruited, trained and created a fantastic community of 31 volunteers
- delivered 2,542 hours of volunteer time
- carried out 536 creative experiences
- worked with 2,610 individuals to provide opportunities

Director of Expression Arts
Catherine Arnell says:

'We are trying to encourage older people to build their confidence to socialise after lockdown and bring life back to communal lounges - not to mention conversation, crafts and cake!'

If you would like to know more about these events please contact Catherine at catherine@expression.co.uk or by phone on **07957 641 471**.

You can also take a look at their work in the community by visiting expression.co.uk or finding them on Facebook and Instagram ([@expressionarts](https://www.instagram.com/expressionarts))



Providing opportunities in each community

This work began during lockdown where its volunteers carers in the community and older people in sheltered housing. From giving out creative kit boxes, Expression Arts began setting up creative coffee mornings based in independent living communal lounges.

Since then, it has been making people feel great by setting up activities such as pottery, animation, painting and singing classes.

Expression Arts is also encouraging the use of creative digital projects in various settings and will be introducing new virtual reality experiences for our very vulnerable residents who find it difficult to go out.

All workshops are free to the community because of funding bids. Expression Arts would like to thank Kent Community Foundation, Wards, Pargator Trust and the Learning Journey Fund for their contribution to the success of projects, as well as the CCC Innovation Fund that has helped development of digital inclusion.

After expanding from just three independent living schemes, Expression Arts is now working with Lang Court, Whitgift Court, Collard House, Cranmer House, Longfield Court and Thornhurst.

expression
in the community

Universal Credit

Many of our tenants claim or will claim Universal Credit. This is a payment to help with your living costs, including your rent.

Sometime between now and 2028, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be introducing Universal Credit to replace the following benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit

If you receive any of these benefits at the moment, you don't need to do anything unless there is a change to your circumstances. If there is, you need to tell the DWP.

You don't need to claim Universal Credit now, only when you receive a 'Migration Notice Letter' and possibly when you have a change in your circumstances.

We don't yet know exactly when the DWP will be completing this change but when they do, you will receive a Migration Notice Letter from them. This will tell you when your existing benefits or tax credits will be ending, the date you must claim Universal Credit by and how to claim it.

Unless there is a change in your circumstances between now and when you receive your Migration Notice Letter, you don't need to do anything else in the meantime.

Universal Credit does not apply to the following people, who should instead claim Housing Benefit for help with their housing costs:

- people who are state pension age, or part of a couple who are both pension age
- people the council has housed in temporary accommodation
- people the council has housed because they are homeless

If you are unsure, you can contact the DWP on **0800 328 5644**.

Alternatively, you can contact the council on **01227 862 142** to speak to a Benefits and Money Advisor. Please remember that Universal Credit, specifically the housing element of it, will be paid directly to you unless the DWP has been notified of a reason for it to be paid directly to your rent account.

Please remember to pay your full rent using any help you're provided with by Universal Credit.

You will receive a Rent Variation Notice from Canterbury City Council in early March 2023 advising what your new rent, including any service charges, will be from Monday 3 April 2023.

If you're claiming Universal Credit at that time, please remember to update Universal Credit with your new rent details, but not before Monday 3 April 2023. Complete the relevant 'to-do' task in your online Universal Credit as soon as you receive it from 3 April 2023. This will maximise the help you may be eligible for from Universal Credit.

Paying by Direct Debit

If you would like to pay your rent by Direct Debit, the council collects Direct Debit rent payments on the first of each calendar month.

If you'd like to set one up, you will need to have a clear rent account at the time of the next available Direct Debit date. We need 10 clear working days between your instruction to set one up and the next available Direct Debit date.

To set up a Direct Debit, please contact **01227 862 142** and press option 2 (rent or payment enquiries) option 3 (to discuss your rent or garage account) and ask to be put directly through to an Income Recovery Officer.



Have your say on council consultations

All the consultations we run are available at [canterbury.gov.uk/consultations](https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/consultations) while they are active. You can also sign up for email notifications at [news.canterbury.gov.uk](https://www.news.canterbury.gov.uk).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?