

Our Homes Newsletter

A newsletter for Chesterfield Borough Council tenants and leaseholders

Summer 2017



Fire safety in your home

What you need to know following the Grenfell Court tower block fire in London.

Rent

If you don't pay you can't stay



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Holme Hall community garden

Housing Services has been working with the resident group Holme Hall Unite to create a community garden on Wardgate Way. The garden can be used by the residents of the flats in the area and for people who appreciate being able to sit out in a beautiful and peaceful setting.

This is a truly community partnership project. The council's housing tenant participation team, Marks and Spencer and local resident group, Holme Hall Unite, have worked for a year with many organisations. During a week in June, they all came together to make the vision a reality.

The council has donated the land and paid for the site to be cleared and paths to be laid. Marks and Spencer has co-ordinated and involved other organisations and volunteers. The clearing work has been carried out by Stone Construction.

As well as bringing all the partners together, Marks and Spencer provided a kitchen to feed everyone. Holme Hall Primary School painted 140 small pots (the pots having been donated by Hope Springs Community Garden, Sutton in Ashfield) for a pergola, and they also made bird and bat boxes to fix in the trees. Woodlands Nursing Home has allowed the long term use of their facilities and storage for Holme Hall Unite. Chesterfield College has designed and built a pergola and raised gardens. The National Trust managed the project during the week of activities, with a number of their gardeners who volunteered to help and they have also donated orchard trees and plants. The Co-op and Derbyshire County Council have given grants for a wild flower meadow and seating. The Eden Project has provided seeds. Chesterfield Markets provided covers for the kitchen. Hope Springs Community Garden, The National Trust and Killingleys all provided plants, and, Virgin media and many others have helped in various ways.

The garden has been designed by a local gardener, Matt Parker who also project managed the creation of the garden.

Cllr Helen Bagley, cabinet member for homes and customers says, "This is a fantastic example of partnership working. It is great to see residents, local people, local businesses as well as organisations from further afield coming together to provide a facility which will be enjoyed by the local community. I am delighted that everyone is working together to provide a community garden which will provide a welcome space for local residents. The health and wellbeing of our residents is really important to us and I would like to thank everyone involved in making this possible. I look forward to seeing the results."

If you want to volunteer to help maintain the garden and be part of a community group, please contact Holme Hall Unite – Tony Hedley on [07547 757670](tel:07547757670).



Tenants reassured about fire safety measures

Tenants are being reassured that all required fire safety measures are in place and up-to-date in council houses and flats.

It follows the tragic fire at the Grenfell Court tower block in London on 14 June, which killed at least 79 people. As we don't have any tower blocks in Chesterfield the circumstances of the London fire are different from any that could potentially happen in our town where the ladders of fire engines would be able to reach all floors of buildings with council tenants in.

We did also receive calls from tenants wanting reassurances about the safety of cladding fitted on council homes over recent years as part of our multi-million refurbishment of council homes.

The cladding used on all Chesterfield homes is Class O rated, which means it cannot be set alight. This material is different to the type and make reportedly used on the Grenfell Court tower block in London.

The class O cladding is physically fitted to the house or flat and then rendered over, which adds another fire prevention layer, and means there is no void left behind the cladding.

In addition:

- All blocks of flats have had recent fire risk assessments carried out by independent fire risk assessors.
- Monthly fire safety checks are carried out in all flats to ensure fire doors and other prevention measures are working correctly and to remove any flammable materials from corridors or communal areas.
- In recent years, working with Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service, we have installed sprinkler systems in sheltered housing schemes and portable misting systems in individual properties where there is a higher risk of fire.

Councillor Helen Bagley, Chesterfield Borough Council's cabinet member for homes and customers, said: "We will ensure any lessons learnt from the terrible incident in London are applied to our own housing stock.

"We have an excellent working relationship with Derbyshire Fire & Rescue to ensure that all council properties comply with, and in most cases exceed, required fire safety standards.

"However, as Chesterfield's biggest landlord with 9,400 properties, we are not complacent and will be talking again with Derbyshire Fire & Rescue to see if there is any new advice or guidance that we can implement, learning the lessons from this latest tragedy."

Alex Johnson, area manager responsible for community safety with Derbyshire Fire & Rescue said: "I would like to assure everybody that Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service carries out regular inspections of blocks of flats, and works closely with Chesterfield Borough Council to ensure all housing stock complies with current fire safety regulations."

Derbyshire Fire & Rescue is advising all tenants to make sure you know what to do in the event of a fire, particularly if you have mobility issues.

Alex added: "If there is a fire inside your flat our advice is to alert all the people in your flat and leave, closing doors behind you. You should follow your escape plan and if there is lots of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air should be clearer. Always use the stairs rather than the lift and call 999 as soon as you are in a safe place.

"If there is a fire elsewhere in the building, then the structure of your flat - the walls, floors and doors - are designed to give you 30 to 60 minutes' protection from a fire. If there is a fire in your building, but not inside your own home, then you are usually safer to stay in your flat unless the heat or smoke from the fire is affecting you. If you stay put, you should still call 999."

Following the Grenfell Court fire our staff and officers from Derbyshire Fire & Rescue held two fire safety events to reassure tenants about the fire prevention measures in place and to answer any questions they had.

Rent - If you don't pay you can't stay

This is a difficult time for many households as welfare reform changes begin to place a financial burden on income and benefits into the home.

Households could struggle more and more to make payments to bills, loans and credit agreements. Please don't let your rent be one of them. Your rent payments are a priority debt and should be paid before most other debts – more information about priority and non –priority debts can be found at www.gov.uk.

Last year over 50 tenants/families were evicted from their homes for rent arrears. Don't become one of them. If you are in rent arrears or just starting to struggle, don't ignore it but contact us instead. If you don't, it will only cause you problems later. We can help you find affordable ways to pay your rent debt and avoid formal action or eviction.

The rents management team is here to help and advise you so contact us as soon as you start having any difficulties on [01246 345501/10](tel:0124634550110). You could also see if you qualify for Housing Benefit by visiting our website at www.chesterfield.gov.uk/bencalc to obtain a free Housing Benefit calculation.

If you receive Universal Credit you will no longer get Housing Benefit paid directly onto your rent account as the DWP will pay the housing costs to you. You will be responsible for paying the full weekly rent charge to the council. However you may still be eligible for Council Tax Support and will need to claim for this from the council.

If your circumstances change then keep in touch with us. We don't know what's happening unless you tell us so contact the rent management team on [01246 345501/10](tel:0124634550110) and we can help you.

If your rent is still paid by Housing Benefit you must supply all the information needed to assess your claim but you may still need to be paying some

of your rent or other charges. If you are in any doubt, then call the rent management team on [01246 345501/10](tel:0124634550110).

If you are unable to clear your debt in full, we may agree a repayment arrangement and will not take any further action against you provided you pay exactly as agreed.

Remember your home is at risk if you fail to pay your rent. If you don't pay you can't stay.

Anti-social behavior update

People often think that because of protection under human rights and equalities laws, the council cannot evict tenants for anti-social behaviour if they have a mental illness or a physical or learning disability (a "protected characteristic"). In fact, we can and do evict.

In several recent cases, tenants have appealed against their eviction because they have a "protected characteristic" under the law. Often, this has been drugs-related. In these cases, we must show that we have taken reasonable measures to enable the tenant to behave acceptably, including offering support. Witnesses provided evidence to the court or the appeal hearing to show that these measures had not worked and that eviction was therefore necessary to protect the rights of the victims.

These cases can be long, detailed and difficult. However, they show that where witnesses work with us, they can get relief from serious anti-social behaviour.



Rents team

Careline and support service awarded the Derbyshire Dignity Award

Our Careline and support service has been awarded the Derbyshire Dignity Award in recognition of the service's continual commitment to ensuring dignity and respect are at the heart of everything we do.

The award is assessed against ten criteria with evidence required to demonstrate each of the points. These ten points describe values and actions that high quality services should undertake.

- 1 Have a zero tolerance of all forms of abuse
- 2 Support people with the same respect you would want for yourself or a member of your family
- 3 Treat each person as an individual by offering a personalised service
- 4 Enable people to maintain the maximum possible level of independence, choice and control
- 5 Listen and support people to express their needs and wants
- 6 Respect people's right to privacy
- 7 Ensure people feel able to complain without fear of retribution
- 8 Engage with family members and carers as care partners
- 9 Assist people to maintain confidence and positive self-esteem
- 10 Act to alleviate people's loneliness and isolation

Julie Harrison, Claire Bennett and Diana Gallagher from the Careline and support service ensured that everything was in place to demonstrate that the service met the required standards.

The feedback received from the awarding body stated 'this application is very good throughout with detailed explanations and plenty of real case examples. There are some great responses here showing extensive good practice which recognises that there is always opportunity to improve.'

This award is the first part and work will now begin on part two, which demonstrates client participation in the continual development and improvement of the service.

Julie Harrison said "In the short time I have been in my post, I have seen some of the good practice undertaken by all members of the team. I was confident that we could gain the award as recognition of the quality of service we provide. We need to build on this good practice and look at how we can improve."

If you would like further information about the Derbyshire Dignity Award, please visit the Derbyshire County Council website. For further information about Careline and support service, please phone **0300 323 0076** or email queries. careline@chesterfield.gov.uk

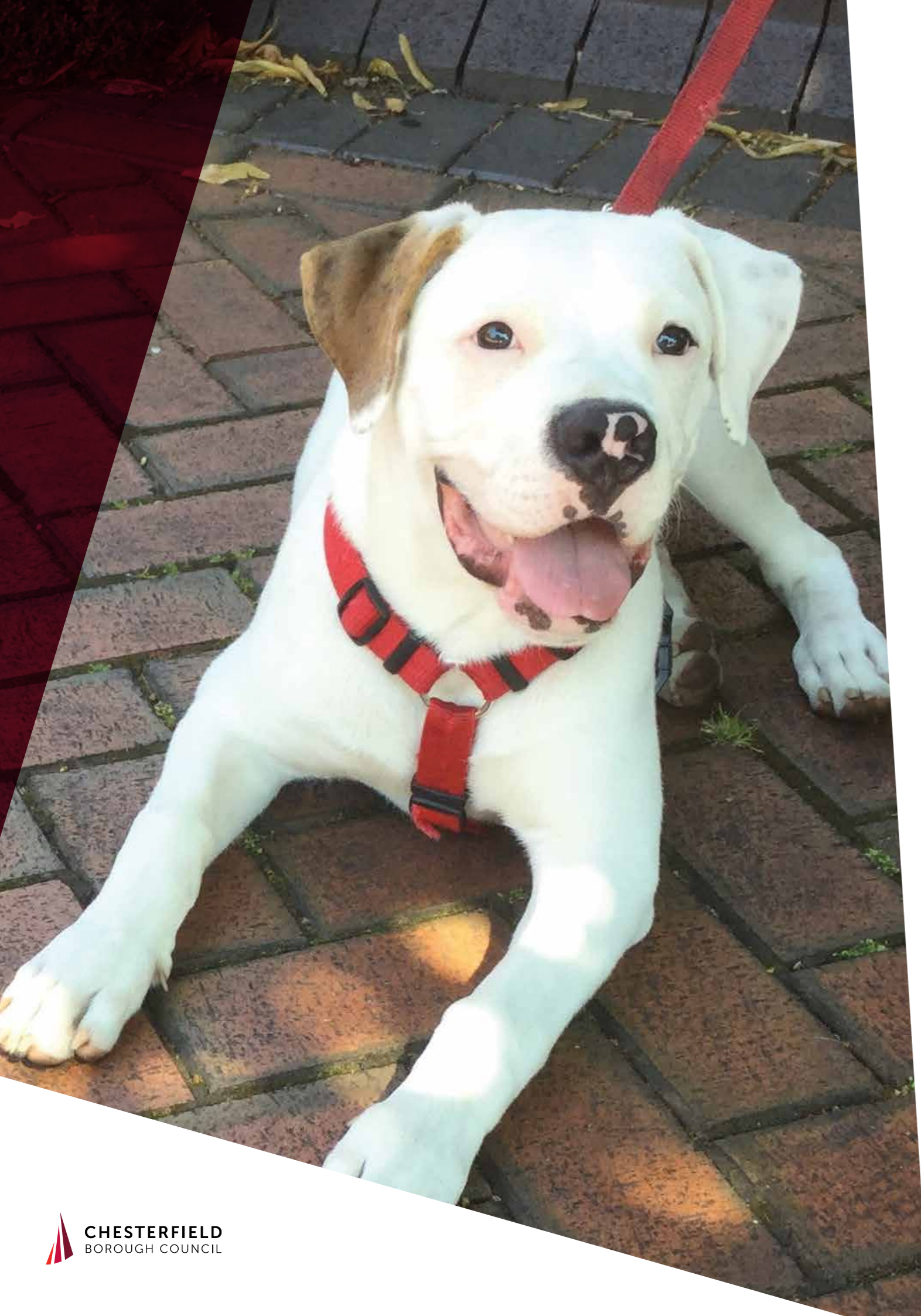


Aston Court funding success

Social inclusion officer Norma Gregory has been working closely with residents at Aston Court in Staveley to submit funding applications. To date Aston Court has received more than £1,300 in funding grants. The residents have been supported by Norma to make applications to Staveley Town Council, North Derbyshire Voluntary Action and Greggs the Bakers.

The funding will support two outings, pay for taxis and a meal at the lunch club at Eckington Civic Centre once a month for a year, a race night with pie and pea supper (open to anyone from the other housing schemes and the surrounding community) and a Christmas buffet and entertainment.

Aston Court is very community minded with every event and outing they organise open to residents of the other sheltered housing schemes and the surrounding community. They are delighted to have received such generous grants from these organisations and intend to put the money to good use. Norma is also working with residents at the new Parkside development to achieve similar levels of success.



Public Space Protection Orders

The Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) is a power under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and came into force in October 2014.

PSPOs are intended to deal with a nuisance or problem in a particular geographical area that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life, by imposing conditions on the use of that area which apply to everyone. They are designed to ensure the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces, safe from anti-social behaviour.

A PSPO can be made by the local authority if it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activities carried out or likely to be carried out, in a public place:

- Have had, or is likely to have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the area.
- Is, or likely to be persistent or continuing in nature.
- Is, or is likely to be unreasonable.
- Justifies the restrictions imposed.

A local authority can make a PSPO on any public space within its own area. The definition of public space is wide and can be any place to which the public or any section of the public has access. This includes all parks, highways, grass verges, land around housing, garage sites and community gardens.

A PSPO can contain restrictions and requirements which will be determined by the local authority after consultation with key stakeholders. These can be targeted against particular behaviours or at particular groups at specific times with more than one restriction being included within the PSPO. This means a PSPO can deal with a wider range of behaviours than the orders and by-laws it replaces.

The PSPO can be in place for a maximum of three years and is designed to be flexible and responsive to need. There is no limit on the number of times that a PSPO can be renewed, as long as the need is still present. Variation of a PSPO can be done at any time to respond to the changing needs of public spaces.

Breaching a PSPO is a criminal offence and enforcement officers can issue fixed penalty notices if appropriate to do so or create a prosecution file.

There is an existing range of civil and legal remedies to control dogs in public areas including the Dogs Act 1871 and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (enforced by the Police for 'dangerous dogs' and 'banned breeds'). Housing services can also control dogs within and around their properties through enforcing the tenancy agreement.

Chesterfield Borough Council will be introducing new requirements to deal with dog fouling and problematic dog behaviour via a PSPO.

Between Monday 26 September and Friday 4th November 2016 a consultation was carried out and the majority of the 309 responses were in support of the new proposals.

The PSPO will be presented to Cabinet on 11 July and then the full council in mid-summer. It is likely that the PSPO will come into force in September/October 2017 and more information will be made available closer to the time.

The proposed offences will be:

- Fouling – i.e. failing to pick up and remove faeces (across the whole borough).
- Dogs on leads – dogs will be required to be on leads in designated areas (for example at cemeteries and nature reserves).
- Dogs on leads by direction – if a dog is causing nuisance or disturbance to another person or animal, an authorised officer can request that dog is put on a lead. An offence is committed when the person responsible for the dog refuses to put the dog on a lead.
- Exclusion – dogs will be excluded from designated children's play areas, some football pitches during the football season and some cricket pitches during the cricket season.

More information is available on the council's website at:

www.chesterfield.gov.uk/pspo

Damage to council property – recharges

Damage caused to council property deliberately or through neglect is a breach of the tenancy agreement. When this occurs, we are likely to take legal action against tenants and charge them for the total costs involved. Other work, such as re-glazing and lock changes, may not be deliberate. However, we must also charge tenants for the costs of these repairs.

Commercial services – improving performance

Since the beginning of this year significant efforts have been made to improve the way we deal with empty properties so tenants can move in sooner and reduce the loss of rental income. So far, we have focussed on working in teams across services to speed up the process. This has enabled 80 properties to be available to let that would otherwise be sat vacant.

Mobile office visiting your area in 2017

On Tuesday mornings every month between 1 April and 31 October, we will be visiting the following areas with the mobile office:

First Tuesday of every month:

- 9.30am Lansbury Store, Mastin Moor
- 10.30am *Devonshire Close / **Darley Close, Staveley (alternate)
- 11.30am Inkersall Green shop area, Inkersall Green Road

Second Tuesday of every month:

- 9.30am *Newland Dale / **Flamsted (alternate)
- 10.30am Recycling Area, Green Farm Close
- 11.30am Shop area Holme Hall

(*Apr/June/Aug/Oct or **May/July/Sept)

Call in to discuss how we can improve your area. We have an estate improvement budget which is available to improve communal areas that the council own and we want your ideas. Tell us about any housing issue you have such as anti-social behaviour, support needs for older people including assistive technology, access to benefit advice, access to maintaining your tenancy if you have rent arrears, and general council issues such as dog fouling, etc.

Come and chat with us, we would love to see you. For more information, contact us on 01246 345147 or email: tpenquiries@chesterfield.gov.uk

Third Tuesday of every month:

- 9.30am *Annesley Close / **Talbot Crescent, Hasland (alternate)
- 10.30am Opposite Co-op, Grangewood Road
- 11.30am Shop area Loundsley Green

Fourth Tuesday of every month:

- 9.30am Arundel Close, Newbold Moor
- 10.30am *Nisa Store, Station Lane / **Redhouse Close, Old/New Whittington (alternate)
- 11.30pm Opposite shops, Barrow Hill

Tenants scrutinise housing services

We have recently recruited some new members to the Tenant Challenge Panel. The purpose of the panel is to review all aspects of the housing services in bite size chunks. In the past they have reviewed the void service, rent service, service standards, to name but a few. When the review is complete, the panel makes recommendations for change, directly influencing the decision making for housing services.

Examples of some changes that have taken place as a result of the Tenant Challenge Panel scrutiny reviews are:

- Voids service – improved procedures, reduced days of storage of abandoned/empty properties from six months to 28 days which has saved money, the number of days that tenants at new properties has increased from seven days to 21 days for the tenants to contact the voids team to address issue with taking over the garden, improved procedures to deal with debt on utility meters, plus many more.
- Rent service – improvements to the rent recovery process, warning letters, plus many more
- Lettable standards – improved the inspection procedures and form



As we have recently recruited a number of new tenants to this panel, they have undertaken some training at the council with a provider called TPAS (tenant engagement experts) around scrutiny skills, increasing the panel's knowledge and experiencing some practical skills. It was a very successful day which everyone enjoyed. Karen Francis, who was new to the panel, said of the training day, "It was very enjoyable. I learnt a lot and it was put over in a very understandable way. The other tenants

were very nice and meeting council staff was good with everyone getting on well. There was no 'them and us'. Come and join us. It's surprising what you get out of it."

Pictured are tenant panel members Karen Francis and Peter Bestwick receiving their scrutiny training certificates from Alison Craig, head of housing services.

If you are interested in being involved in the Tenant Challenge Panel and you would like to find out more, phone Kim Walsh or Maria Slack on 01246 345147 for an informal chat or email tpenquiries@chesterfield.gov.uk

Tenant working groups

All this summer, groups of tenant volunteers, councillors and officers will be working on some important aspects of the business plan for housing services which will help to improve our services and make sure we are financially sound over the years to come.

These groups are dealing with:

- Rents, rent collection and management, including the possibility of moving to a 52 week rent year
- Allocation of housing
- Standards of empty properties when they are re-let
- Repairs standards
- A new tenancy agreement

Their work will be finished by the end of August. Afterwards, there will be wider consultation.

Get in touch

Council contacts

Careline (including support service)

T: 0300 323 0076

Customer services contact centre

T: 01246 345 345

Environmental services (bins and recycling)

T: 01246 345 345

Home improvement agency (minor improvements)

T: 01246 345 748 / 345 701

Homelessness prevention team

T: 01246 345 825

E: homelessness.prevention@chesterfield.gov.uk

Homelessness (out of hours)

T: 08456 058 058 or 01629 532 600

Housing option team (housing waiting list and allocations of council housing)

T: 01246 345 700

E: onthemove@chesterfield.gov.uk

Housing Benefit and Council Tax support

T: 01246 345 345

Minicom: 01246 345 285

Neighbourhoods team

T: 01246 345 071

E: neighbourhoods.team@chesterfield.gov.uk

Rents and rent recovery

T: 01246 345 345

Reporting repairs during office hours

T: (Freephone) 0800 5875 659

E: repair.requests@chesterfield.gov.uk

Repairs - emergency only (out of hours)

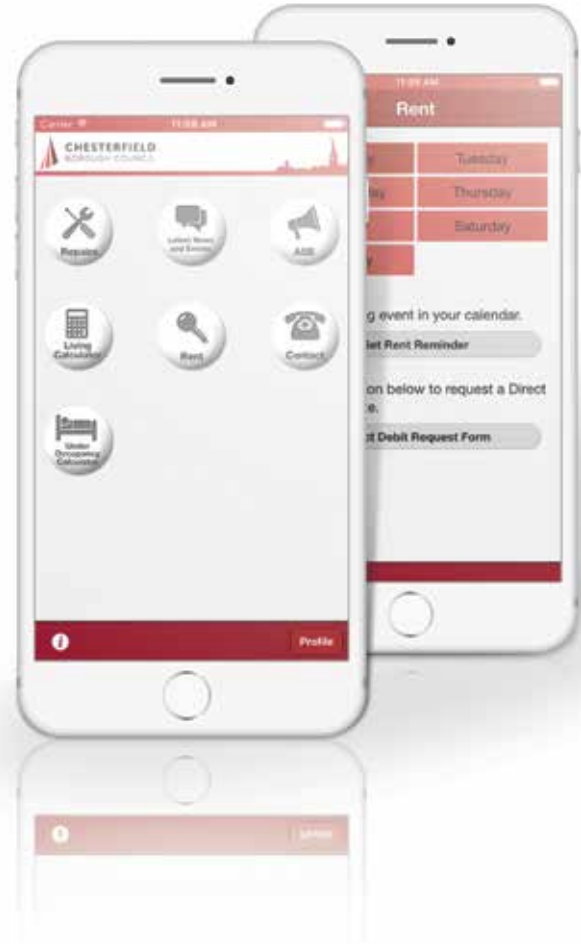
T: 01246 345 041

Text / voice messages

T: 07960 910 264

Smart phone app

Get our updated free smart phone app. Just type Chesterfield Council into your app store.



ARE WE ACCESSIBLE TO YOU? IF NOT ASK US!

کیا ہم تک آپ کی رسائی ہے؟ اگر نہیں تو ہمیں بتائیے!

你可覺得易於與我們接觸？若不同的話，請提出要求。

Czy łatwo jest skontaktować się z nami? Jeżeli nie, powiedz nam o tym!

Siamo accessibili nei vostri riguardi? In caso contrario rivolgetevi a noi!