

Our Homes Newsletter

A newsletter for Chesterfield Borough Council tenants and leaseholders

Winter 2016



Find out how we're taking
action against drugs.

Read all about **tree
planting at Holme Hall.**



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Action against drugs

Although crime rates in Derbyshire are falling, Chesterfield, like all towns of its size, does have some problems with drug taking. Earlier this year residents on one estate decided they had suffered enough and worked with our housing neighbourhoods team to take action at homes where drug dealing was happening.

By working together to gather the necessary evidence the courts issued three closure orders to stop the properties being used to sell drugs. Two were council flats. Two were council flats and one was a privately rented house. A closure order means that no one apart from council officers can enter the property, for a period of three months, to provide some relief for the neighbourhood and to allow the council to apply to the court for permanent eviction of the council tenants.

The properties were all in the same area and the drug-selling was connected, which was why we decided to ask for all three closure orders on the same day. We then obtained eviction orders against the council tenants. The private tenants left and the landlord put the house on the market.

This was the culmination of months of the painstaking collection and preparation of evidence by staff from the Neighbourhoods Team, with great support and assistance from the council's legal team, the police and the community safety team.

However, **the most important people in bringing about this success were the neighbours, who decided that enough was enough** and provided evidence to make the court action possible. The identity of the neighbours was not revealed in court. Instead, the judge accepted evidence from our

tenancy management officer who reported on the evidence that neighbours had provided to her. The court will not always accept this type of 'hearsay' evidence. However, on this occasion, the number of neighbours who gave evidence and the detail of their reports was enough to persuade the court.

In another recent case, a tenant's boyfriend was selling drugs from a council flat. A neighbour gave us direct evidence, which allowed us to obtain an injunction in court that meant this person would have been arrested if he came near the block of flats, or approached the neighbours, or even used someone else to threaten or intimidated them. We then obtained an eviction order against the tenant.

These cases show that when neighbours are willing to provide us with information, we will provide them with support and we will work alone or with the Police to take decisive action against people selling drugs on our estates.

Whilst the courts normally require witnesses to provide direct evidence, in some cases, it is possible for them to remain anonymous. So if you are having this type of problem, talk to us.

T: 01246 345071

E: Neighbourhood.Team@chesterfield.gov.uk



Annual report – 2015/16

Each financial year housing services produces an annual report to let our tenants know how well we are performing, celebrate our achievements and highlight where we could improve. It also states how we met the regulatory standards for social housing which focus on:

- Tenant involvement and customer care
- Maintaining your home
- Allocating homes and setting rents
- Looking after the neighbourhood and communal areas
- Value for money
- Ensuring we are financially secure

The full report is available on our website at www.chesterfield.gov.uk. Put **'housing annual report'** in the search box.

Alternatively you can request a printed version by calling 01246 345142.

The real impact of rent arrears

Your housing service is facing difficult times. We don't get any government subsidy to run the services you receive.

We depend completely on the money we receive from rents. Amongst other things, this pays for repairs, planned maintenance, estate improvements, support for vulnerable people, Careline, the response to anti-social behaviour, landscape maintenance, the ranger service, support for vulnerable tenants, and the allocations service. However, our income to deliver these services is decreasing because of the one percent cut to your rents each year until 2020, the impact of changes to Universal Credit and other welfare reforms, and other Government housing changes that are in the pipeline.

It is more important than ever that tenants pay their rent and apply for any benefits they are entitled to.

We are very keen to help people who are struggling to pay their rent and to claim benefits. It is really important that if you are having difficulties, you contact our rent support team.

Phone us on 01246 345345 or call in at the Customer Service Centre at New Square in the Town Centre.

Opening hours:

8:30am to 5pm	Mon, Tue, Thurs
10am to 5pm	Wed
8:30am to 4:30pm	Fri
9am to Noon	Sat

We can offer advice, help and support. Find out about the range of help you can get, including benefits advice, managing debt and making arrangements to pay off arrears by instalments.

If you fall behind on your rent payments, this breaks your tenancy agreement and we must look at eviction. Many people think we will not evict them because, for instance, they have dependent children. Unfortunately, we do. And if they approach us to be re-housed, we consider that it is their fault that they became homeless and we do not permanently rehouse them. If a tenant has been evicted for rent arrears, or their tenancy has ended with rent owing, this will also prevent them from being rehoused from the housing waiting list.

How to pay:

- Use Direct Debit. This can be set up by ringing 01246 345345 or by downloading a form at www.chesterfield.gov.uk and clicking on the 'Pay It' link.
- Online via the Council website at www.chesterfield.gov.uk by clicking on the Pay It link and following the instructions.
- Come in to the Customer Service Centre
- Over the phone by calling the automated 24-hour helpline 0345 602 0214.
- At any Post Office or PayPoint locations in the borough.

How the tenancy sustainment service helped Jim

Jim was rehoused through the homeless team as he had been homeless and sleeping rough for a long time.

But this good news turned sour when Jim found paying his bills harder than he was expecting. Although he was getting housing benefit, his water charges were not being covered and he struggled to pay them. He made an arrangement with the rent recovery team to pay the arrears but this was not kept to. The rents team extended Jim's tenancy to give him time to sort out the rent arrears but when he did not keep to the agreement he made with them, they served a notice to end his tenancy.

At this point our tenancy sustainment officer Pearl contacted Jim and helped him claim disability benefits which gave him more income and helped him to pay his bills. She encouraged him to budget better and helped him with a water meter so that all his rent would be covered by Housing Benefit.

Jim had to make an appeal to the council against the decision to serve a notice to end his tenancy, or he would have lost his home. He did this with the help of Derbyshire Law Centre in Chesterfield. Jim has kept to his agreement and still sees a tenancy sustainment officer when he needs advice about his tenancy.

If you are having difficulty paying your rent and need support in budgeting ring the call centre on 345345, or call in at the customer service centre. If you need the help of the tenancy sustainment team ring 345354. Please do not ignore letters and calls from the rents team though, as they can and will end tenancies if they do not get a reply when they try to contact tenants to offer help.

Careline and support services

The Careline response team operates 24/7 meaning there is always someone available to help the 3,000 people connected to our Careline alarm system.

Our support services team visits more than 800 people on a regular basis acting as an advocate on their behalf and helping to ensure that each one receives the right level of support.

Each of these vital services supports people to live as independently as possible in their own homes.

Norma Gregory is our social inclusion officer, helping to:

- Build links with community projects, community centres and other organisations to increase levels of social contact for individuals;
- Identify and respect individual skills, including the skills of older people gained in previous employment to actively involve them in planning and delivering events and activities;
- Give everyone the opportunity to participate in the wider community;
- Encourage and support people to gain access to social networks.

The range of activities at our sheltered housing schemes now includes:

- Coffee mornings, lunch outings, bingo
- Cinema clubs
- Healthy living events
- Chair-based exercise classes aimed at improving strength, balance, and support falls prevention.

Interested? Contact Norma at the Careline office on 0300 323 0076

Welcome to the new Parkside

When the old Parkside sheltered housing scheme was demolished in 2014, our ambition was to replace it with accommodation that met the highest modern standards and the current and future needs of our residents.

The new development of 22 two bedroom apartments is spacious, attractive, and is in a fantastic location, looking out onto the Stand Road Park and the bowling green. It has a private courtyard and garden area and is close to local amenities, shops, and a bus route into the town centre.

Each apartment has a level entry shower, there are two assisted bathrooms for those with greater needs and a mobility scooter storage room.

The wide corridors are designed to be light and to maximise views over the communal garden and park, and there are seating areas throughout the building where people can meet or relax.

The official opening was performed by Carol McManus, wife of former councillor and Alderman Jim McManus, who died in August last year. Alderman McManus had been a councillor for 28 years and cabinet member for housing for four years before he stood down from the council in May 2015. The building has been dedicated jointly to the memory of Alderman McManus and Andy Simpson, Chesterfield Borough Council's head of housing from July 1996 to July 2013, who died in February 2015. Both men were involved in coming up with the plans to demolish the old Parkside and build a modern replacement in its place.



Trees – what tenants need to know

- Housing services may arrange to carry out work on trees in communal areas if there is a risk to people or property.
- Tenants are obliged to maintain their hedges, trees and shrubs in their gardens.
- Neighbours can trim branches overhanging their property without permission but they are not allowed to cross over boundaries or lean ladders over the boundary without permission from the neighbour. It's best to talk to your neighbour first to agree what to do with the waste.
- No work can be carried out on trees if there are birds nesting, usually between March and August.
- Do not cut a tree with a Tree Preservation Order on it or you can face a fine up to £20,000. Permission is needed first from planning enforcement.
- We won't carry out work if a tree produces a sticky residue or dropped leaves/ blossom etc. Pruning will not solve the problem.
- Normally, we won't carry out work to improve light - there is no right to light where trees are concerned.
- We won't carry out work to provide a clear TV signal.
- We won't remove roots that aren't causing a problem.
- Normally, we won't reduce a tree's height if the tree is safe.

Further contacts

- Trees on housing land and are the council's responsibility eg. communal spaces around flats - queries to the neighbourhoods team on 01246 345142.
- Trees not on housing land but are on council land such as parks - queries to landscape services on 01246 345127.
- High boundary hedges - queries to planning enforcement on 01246 345783.
- Trees affecting public roads and pavements - queries to Call Derbyshire on 08456 058058.



Tree planting at Holme Hall

On 16 November, residents from Holme Hall and Loundsley Green joined forces with council staff to plant 100 trees around a copse at Linacre Road.

Children from local schools got involved in digging holes and planting the trees of various species which had been donated by the Woodland Trust.

The event was organised by local community group Holme Hall Unite, with support from the council's tenant engagement team. Folk singer Emma Stevens performed to the crowd as a treat for all their hard work.

If you are interested in getting involved in improving the area you live in, please contact the Tenant Engagement Team on 01246 345 142.

Food safety

Food Safety Week this year aimed to help people better understand how to waste less food, by making more use of their freezers. Research from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has revealed that 68 percent of UK adults have thrown food away in the past month.

Over two thirds of those who had thrown away food said they had done this because it was past its use by date. Other top reasons for throwing food away included buying too much and not eating it, which was reported by 30 percent of people; and not having the chance to eat food before it went off, which almost a quarter gave as a reason for putting food in the bin.

This contributes to the **seven million tonnes of food that is wasted in the UK each year** which, according to the Love Food Hate Waste campaign, costs each household an average of £470 each year.

Chesterfield Borough Council is backing the FSA's campaign to encourage residents to help reduce the amount of food waste by freezing food before it reaches its use-by date. This will remove the need to throw it away once the use-by date expires.

Use by date is about safety

The before use by date is about safety and the most important date to remember! Foods can be eaten (and most can be frozen) up until the use by date, but not after. You will see use by dates on food that goes off quickly, such as meat products or ready-prepared salads. For the use by date to be a valid guide, you must carefully follow storage instructions.

Best before date is about quality

The before best date is about quality and not safety. The food will be safe to eat after this date but may not be at its best. Its flavour and texture might not be as good. The best before dates appear on a wide range of frozen, dried, tinned and other foods. The best before date will only be accurate if the food is stored according to the instructions on the label.

After the use by date, don't eat it, cook it or freeze it. The food could be unsafe to eat or drink, even if it is stored correctly and looks and smells fine.

Lots of people believe food can only be frozen on the day of purchase, but the freezer is like a pause button and you can safely freeze most foods right up to the use by date. You can even cook defrosted meat into a new meal and freeze it to eat on another day. With so much food being thrown away in the UK each year, we want Chesterfield residents to think about how they can use their freezers to their full potential, rather than putting food in the bin.

While food is kept safe in the freezer, it's the quality that deteriorates over time, so the FSA recommends eating it within three to six months and checking for any freezing instructions on the packaging. Once defrosted, the pause button is off, so defrost food as and when you need it and eat it within 24 hours of it being fully defrosted.

And remember if you really do have to throw food away please put it in your green bin.

Markham Court in Bloom

Earlier this year, Markham Court was in full bloom and displaying a range of beautiful vibrant colours thanks to the green fingers of Anita Stevenson, who moved to Markham Court two years ago.



Since Anita arrived she has brought both life and colour into the gardens, making it a place for all the tenants to enjoy.

An established large tree has been turned into a 'Memory Tree', which is adorned with tokens of someone special or an occasion that someone wants to mark.

There are hanging baskets, hay baskets, giant flower tubs along with the bedding plants in the many borders. The residents are also adding to the shrubs in the gardens, and a wide range of vegetables. The garden has brought tenants together and there is a wonderful community spirit for those living at Markham Court. Tenant Hen Bradshaw said that she "loves living at Markham Court with its pleasant accommodation and stunning gardens, as well as having friendly neighbours to chat with". Hen and her husband Gary recently renewed their wedding vows in the garden under a tree at Markham Court as they consider it to be a very special place.

If you are interested in living at Markham Court, please contact the Housing option team on 01246 345 700 or email: onthemove@chesterfield.gov.uk

Tenant Participation Recruiting to Vacancies

Would you like to influence Housing Services?

Volunteers are needed to help improve the housing service. There are vacancies on the following:

- The communications group checks our published materials are easy to read.
- Tenants Inspector group 'mystery shop' our services to check how well we deliver them.
- The Tenant Challenge Panel reviews services and make recommendations about how they can be improved.
- No experience needed as full training is provided so if you interested please contact the Tenant Engagement Team on 01246 345142.

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)

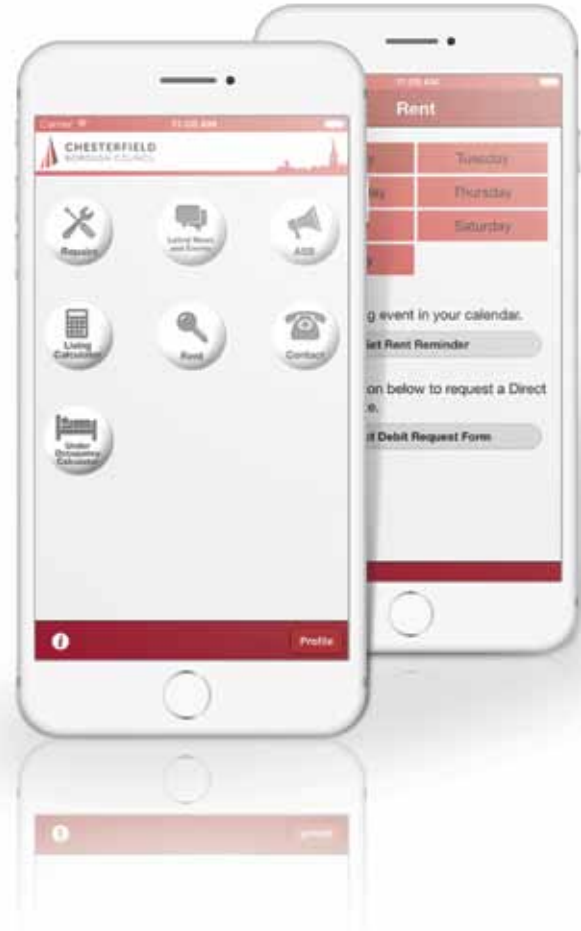
T: 01246 345 041

Text / voice messages

T: 07960 910 264

Smart phone app

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



Christmas closure dates

Council offices will be closed on the following dates:

- Monday 26 December
- Tuesday 27 December
- Wednesday 28 December
- Monday 2 January

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!