

THERE IS A HAPPY EVER AFTER...

HomeChoice has changed

IT HAS been a busy time in the housing advice department, following changes we introduced to the HomeChoice Scheme over the summer. Over 2,300 applicants have returned their forms and updated their information on file – so a big thank you for that. It has meant that our housing advice team have worked tirelessly over the summer so that the new scheme was introduced on the 1st September.

There has been no change to advertising and properties are still advertised on a fortnightly basis, but now specify which band will be given preference for letting.

Just to remind you, applicants have been placed in a Band between 1 and 4 depending on their housing need;

- Band 1 – very urgent housing need
- Band 2 – urgent housing need
- Band 3 – non-urgent housing need
- Band 4 – no current housing need

The quotas for letting are;
 Band 1 – 50% of available properties
 Band 2 – 30% of available properties
 Band 3 – 20% of available properties

If you need further information please contact the following;

- Housing Advice Team – 01926 456430
- Your local Warwickshire Direct, or Riverside House



Don and Frances Richardson, with Buster the dog.

YOU might remember in the Spring edition of Home News, we introduced the Tenants Incentive Grant Scheme, which offered a cash incentive of up to £15,000 to tenants prepared to downsize their homes.

The incentive was offered to tenants in 3, 4 and 5 bedroom houses, who were under-occupying their home and willing to move to more suitable accommodation, so that families waiting for larger properties could be housed.

There was a good response, with many residents taking the opportunity to review their living arrangements.

Nicola Leech, Lettings Officer, co-ordinated the scheme "I was really

pleased with the response we had. I went out to meet all the tenants who wanted to move with this Scheme. Many of them had wanted to move because their property was too large, their gardens too big, or for health reasons, but considered moving too expensive or too much of an upheaval. With this Scheme, we have been able to work closely with them to help them move into housing more suited to their needs and in areas where they wished to be re-housed."

One couple who did make the move and downsize from three bedrooms to one were Mr & Mrs Richardson, who had lived in their property for nearly 20 years. With Mrs

Richardson's lack of mobility and neither of them getting any younger, they were finding that their home was too big for them to manage. They didn't really need three bedrooms and the cost of heating a big house was getting more and more expensive.

"Once you're no longer enjoying your home, it becomes very stressful to live there. I found I didn't want to leave the house, but neither did I want to stay inside – it just wasn't where we wanted to be", said Mrs Richardson.

The Incentive scheme seemed a great opportunity to get the move they wanted and also get some financial help to do it.

A one bedroom bungalow became available in Warwick and the Richardsons drove around the area to see it – it was near St Nicholas Park, with a lovely big garden and they became quite excited at the prospect of being able to move to such a nice place.

"They've done us proud!" said Mrs Richardson of Nicola Leech and Denise Darlison who co-ordinated the move and helped them every step of the way.

The move was completed in just 8 weeks and they have never looked back.

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Survey

How satisfied are you with the service you receive from Housing and Property Services? If you receive one of our survey forms please find the time to complete and return it.

All completed surveys will be entered into a Prize Draw for £100 of high street vouchers. Surveys are being sent by an independent company, commissioned by the Council and we need your input to help prioritise Housing Management Services.

Well done Eden Court!

AN EXAMPLE of a community working together to improve the environment is at Eden Court in Leamington Spa.

Rubbish was being left in hallways and outside flats, rather than being taken down to the bins. This meant cleaners were spending a lot of time moving rubbish bags, instead of cleaning – it was becoming a bit of a downward spiral.

One of our Housing Officers worked with the residents to resolve the issue and rubbish is no longer left in communal areas or hallways, instead it is being put into the bins. The cleaners now have more time to spend cleaning and Eden Court is a much improved place to live!



Eden Court by night.

Their new home is all on one level so that Mrs Richardson can easily get around and is small enough for them to manage comfortably. They have a lovely garden which they get a huge amount of enjoyment from and also are close to St Nicholas Park where their dog takes them for walks!

The Cash Incentive helped with their removals and with replacing some of their furniture which needed to be downsized. Mrs Richardson was able to buy a walking frame and a wheelchair which has helped to make life even easier.

"It's a dream come true! We're so much happier and relaxed here – even the dog is calmer!"

The Tenants Incentive Grant Scheme had limited funding and has now closed. Ten households have been re-housed under this Scheme which is being reviewed and may be re-introduced again at some time in the future.

However, a further Scheme, known as the Resettlement Scheme is continuing. This involves help with moving to low demand accommodation designated for those who are 60 years or over. Eligible tenants can get help with removals, refitting of carpets and curtains and refitting the washing machine. You may also get help with connection of gas and electricity supplies and redirection of your post. Properties available under this Scheme are included in the fortnightly HomeChoice advert.

Want to find out more? Then why not give us a call and find out if you would be able to apply for this incentive. See Direct Dial Directory.

The Cost of Fly Tipping



DID you know that fly tipping costs Housing and Property Services around £100,000 each year? And did you know that this is money that could be spent on fencing, bathroom and kitchen refurbishments, new windows and new heating for instance. Instead this money has to be used to cover the cost of collecting and disposing of waste, because it has been left on the Council's land or property.

You would be amazed at the amount of rubbish that has been fly tipped; mattresses, sofas, fridge freezers, left in flats, garage sites, alley ways and other open spaces.

Apart from the fact they are hazardous, they can also attract vermin, start smelling and become an ugly eye sore.

It is not a pleasant or welcome task for the Council to have to deal with, especially when there are much easier ways of disposing of bulky items;

- The Council's collection service for bulky waste items – call 01926 456339 to arrange collection from your home. Prices start from £10 for 1 item (£8 concessions).
- Community Freebay, a furniture recycling scheme, where you can swap unwanted items at www.communityfreebay.co.uk
- Kenilworth Lions Club Charity Furniture Store on 01926 864093

Support for tenants

THERE are times when the Council is made aware of tenants whose behaviour is affecting their neighbours and perhaps jeopardising their own tenancy. What we try hard to do is understand their personal circumstances and the issues they deal with in their daily lives that might be affecting their behaviour.

There could be any number of issues from drink or drugs and illness to difficulties in coping with the responsibility of running a home.

The Council's Housing Officers and Tenancy Enforcement Officers work in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies to help people sustain their tenancy during these difficult times. Two such agencies are Bromford Group and Swanswell Trust.

The Council's Tenancy Enforcement Officer, Sue Sweeney says "the input from independent agencies is invaluable when addressing the behaviour of vulnerable tenants. With the appropriate support and advice, tenants can understand the impact of their behaviour on those around them and this can help with resolving difficult situations, resulting in a win win situation and a positive outcome for all involved."

This approach is far better than taking enforcement action which could result in eviction or homelessness. Tenants will be offered the practical help and support they need to enable them to sustain their tenancy.

If you would like to know more about the support available, then contact your Housing Officer.

Fighting fraud

IT IS a sad fact that fraudsters pocket billions of pounds of public money each year, money that could otherwise have been spent on high quality services to the public and to you, our customers.

Warwick District Council is determined to do everything that it reasonably can to deter, prevent and detect fraud. Sometimes this has to include sharing data about our tenants with other bodies responsible for auditing and administering public funds.

The Audit Commission is one such body, and by participating in their National Fraud Initiative we become part of one of the most successful public sector anti-fraud schemes in the country. Details of the National Fraud Initiative can be found on the Council's website: www.warwickdc.gov.uk/nfi.

The Council want to assure all tenants that any data disclosed under the National Fraud Initiative is subject to strict security procedures to prevent it from falling into the hands of unauthorised persons.

If you have any concerns or would like further information about the National Fraud Initiative, please contact Ian Wilson in Finance tel: 01926 456817 or the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Do not avert your eyes!



A SHOCKING image isn't it?

It shows the remains of a house in the district following a devastating fire.

The family involved lost everything they had – furniture, clothes, all their belongings – in fact, all they have left in the world is a few charred remains. And without insurance, they have no

way of replacing the belongings they have lost.

Just a small payment each week with your rent would help you to safeguard yourself and your family from unexpected events that can shatter your life.

Don't let it happen to you. Call Satnam Sangha on 01926 456408 to find out more about our weekly paid insurance.

Silver for Chandos Court

CONGRATULATIONS to Chandos Court Sheltered Scheme, who have just received a Silver award for their garden in this year's Britain in Bloom competition.

Residents and staff have worked tirelessly over the past few months, cleaning and clearing out the garden and purchasing and planting the flowers.

Their hard work has resulted in a beautiful garden, right in the middle of Leamington Spa – with quiet seating areas and brightly coloured floral displays, creating a really peaceful and relaxing haven for residents of the home.

Glory May-Flanagan the Warden said, "Getting the garden in shape for the competition gave the residents a really fulfilling project to work on. They enjoyed planting the flowers and working together to get it looking good. The Silver award was a real bonus for us but there's no stopping us now – we're already working on how we'll get Gold next year!!"



Enjoying the award winning garden.

Electricity Theft - Update

AS A result of the Council's initiative to prevent electricity theft, a tenant has been prosecuted by Central Networks, sent to prison for three years, and evicted from his flat by the Council. Proceedings have commenced in similar cases.

The practice of bypassing the electricity meter and diverting the communal supply into the property is extremely dangerous, endangering the lives of those involved and of others living close by.

The Council is continuing to work in partnership with Central Networks who will follow up evidence of tampering with the electricity supply promptly. This will result in those responsible facing both prosecution and eviction.

Times are hard, we are all facing increasing fuel bills, but in the interests of your own safety and your neighbours, don't take this illegal and dangerous route to resolve the situation. Instead contact your suppliers direct and talk to them, or speak to Citizens Advice Bureau.