

YOUR *update* FROM THE HOUSING TEAM

Message from **LISA BARKER, HEAD OF HOUSING**



Welcome to our winter newsletter with the latest news plus important advice and details of local support services.

We have been busy since our last newsletter as we continue to maintain and improve homes or build new ones, whilst playing our part in helping the District Council work towards its net zero carbon ambitions.

In the wake of spiralling energy costs, food prices and transport costs, we know that many households in our district will be struggling and particularly so as we move into winter. We are doing everything we can alongside our partners in the community to provide meaningful, practical support to help us all deal with these challenging financial times.

Help and support is out there, and we urge you to contact the Housing team or the many local agencies available if you find yourself in difficulties. We've inserted a cost-of-living leaflet with a list of useful numbers and contacts, or you can go to our website which now has a page dedicated to information about, and links to national and local support packages as well as professional organisations who are able to offer assistance and advice.

If you are struggling to pay your rent, get in touch with us as early as possible. The Housing team can talk to you about benefits or grants you may be able to get or put you in touch with Keira and Isla our Financial Inclusion officers, who can help you to maximise your income and offer budgeting solutions.

Wishing you all a happy, healthy, and peaceful festive season.

NEW COUNCIL OWNED AFFORDABLE HOMES

Our ambitious programme of local affordable council house building has continued during 2022.

Warwick District Council's approved contractor Speller Metcalfe (Malvern) are on site and in the early stages of the redevelopment of the former Waverley Riding Stables in Cubbington. On site, there will be 17 new build units, that are all energy efficient and include air source heat pumps, solar panels and electric vehicle charging points. Seven of the properties are available for social and affordable rents and shared ownership.

The development of 54 energy efficient homes at Europa Way were completed earlier this year, and progress continues at Oakley Grove where we are building a mix of houses, bungalows and flats which include homes for social and affordable rents along with shared ownership which are currently all sold subject to contract.

Available homes are listed via our HomeChoice scheme, visit warwickdc.gov.uk/housing for details.



Waverley Riding Stables development

DIFFICULTIES PAYING YOUR RENT? COME AND TALK TO US AS SOON AS YOU CAN. WE ARE HERE TO HELP.
Visit the Difficulties Paying your Rent page on the website for advice, complete the on-line form or call Landlord Operations on 01926 456129 - Option 3, Option 1, Option 2

NEWS FROM THE CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM

With the help of England's leading tenant engagement experts TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service), we have been working with residents and teams across the council exploring and developing ways for you to influence services both now and in the future.



The process started with a Smart Review, an honest in-depth self-assessment from people across Housing and Asset Management regarding the following important areas;

- **Governance and Transparency** - Is there a clearly defined and agreed role for residents to hold the Council to account on standards of service delivery, strategy, performance and decision making?
- **Scrutiny** - Does the Council have appropriate and agreed checking processes in place to measure the standards of its service.
- **Business and Strategy** - are residents, meaningfully engaged in helping to create, monitor and review the Council's engagement strategy?
- **Complaints** - Is there a clear, accessible and continuously publicised complaints policy designed with residents, that shows how to complain, timescales, routes for redress, how to access help and support and who has responsibility?
- **Information and Communication** - Is information provided to you clear, easily understood and accessible to the customers who are receiving it.
- **Resources for Engagement** - Does the Council provide sufficient resources to deliver effective engagement and do you have the opportunity to influence the decision about the resources made available?
- **Community and Wider Engagement** - Does the Council provide opportunities for residents to engage in emerging social housing sector policy consultations and responses?

TPAS reviewed the results of this and made recommendations for further action to meet the areas where we need to do more.

We then held group sessions with residents and staff which identified four key areas for development.

- **Trust** - residents being able to raise issues/ concerns and ideas for improvement
- **Present** - active listening to truly understand what someone is saying and what is needed to resolve or improve
- **Proficiency** - staff having the tools, skills, and knowledge they need to deliver great services and responding to the views and experiences of residents
- **Together** - residents and staff working effectively together

Thank you to all the residents and staff who gave time to this group, your amazing ideas and recommendations will be integral to the work to come.

FALLOW HILL COMMUNITY CENTRE



The Housing team were joined by Councillors and residents in September to officially open the newly refurbished community room at Fallow Hill.

The room has undergone a full renovation to improve the fire safety and install a new kitchen, bathroom, doors and entry system. The contractors who carried out the works also kindly gifted a TV and WiFi cabling.

At the opening Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets, gave thanks to those involved for bringing it back in to use and outlined the future plans for the space including as a homework hub for children to come together with free WiFi access and as a meeting point for residents to enjoy a coffee and a chat.

The Fallow Hill Community Room can be used by any resident and is bookable via the Council's website.



ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Annual Report to tenants demonstrating how we're working to improve our homes and the service delivery data, is now available on the Warwick District Council website www.warwickdc.gov.uk. If you do not have access to the website and would like a copy sent to you by post please call **01926 456445**.

FUN DAY

On Saturday 15 October we held the first Europa Way Community Fun day.

The event which was organised by the Housing Services team in partnership with St Nicholas Church was a chance for new residents living in Myton Green, Beauchamp Park and the Priors to come together meet their neighbours and local councillors to find out more about what activities and services are available to them in the community.

Thanks to the sponsorship and support of a number of WDC contractors and social housing landlords there was a range of fun activities, food, music and information stalls which was enjoyed by more than 100 residents who turned out on a lovely sunny day.



MONEY ADVICE MARKET

In partnership with Warwickshire County Council and the Department of Work and Pensions our Community Wellbeing team organised a 'Money Advice Market'.

It provided an opportunity for residents to access support and advice from a range of local organisations including Act on Energy, Citizens' Advice South Warwickshire, Christians Against Poverty, EON, Family Information Service, Sky Blues in the Community, Healthwatch Warwickshire, Sydni Centre, Amaddiyha Centre, Repair Café and our Financial Inclusion service. In addition there were children's craft activities and a cooking on a budget demonstration.

Over 200 people attended and the main issues raised were a need for benefit and debt advice and support. Look out for similar events which we will be organising at venues across the district in the coming months.

PROBLEMS WITH DAMP AND MOULD

Damp can be very common in UK homes and can make your home less pleasant and unsightly which could lead to mould on walls and furniture when not remedied or further problems including making timber window frames rot. Damp can also encourage the growth of mould and mites which can also be the source of many health problems, including respiratory infections, asthma and allergies. If you think you have any problems with damp please come to us in the first instance, we want to help you and get these problems sorted for you. Please contact the Housing Repairs team on **01926 456129** and see the leaflet enclosed for more details.

THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION TEAM ARE HERE TO HELP YOU

The Financial Inclusion team are even busier this year dealing with an increasing number of referrals.

Although the cost-of-living crisis is not a new problem, resources that used to be available are disappearing, many charities are struggling, and awards and grants are getting smaller.

The good news is that, through their support the Financial Inclusion team have helped tenants to save or raise an additional £100k this year by:

- giving budgeting advice
- helping maximise tenants' income by helping them apply for basic or additional benefits
- applying for grants from local and national charities for white goods, and other essential household items such as beds and bedding
- contacting utility companies to get gas/electric bills or payments reduced or even written off
- assisting with applications for discretionary housing payments to give people a helping hand with their rent payments
- securing emergency credit for tenants who are struggling with gas and electric payment top ups
- making an appeal for backdated benefits or when they consider that a decision on a benefit claim was incorrect



The team has also stepped in when things have got really tough for our tenants, preventing eviction and homelessness, and providing vouchers for foodbanks.

Isla and Keira are our two Financial Inclusion Officers. They can assist all Council tenants with welfare benefits and money advice, contact them at moneyadvicereferrals@warwickdc.gov.uk or by calling **01926 456336** or **01926 456626**.

DO YOU NEED HELP FOR YOUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY?

The **Family Information Service (FIS)** provides information, advice and guidance for families with children and young people aged from 0 -18 years (25 with SEND) living in Warwickshire, providing support and signposting on issues including:

- Family relationships
- Money
- Housing
- Parenting
- SEND
- Childcare
- Health and wellbeing

The team works closely with commissioned services and external agencies like Foodbanks, Citizen's Advice and Children & Family Centres so can make referrals into these where appropriate and with the family's consent.

For further information visit warwickshire.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies

Tel **01926 414144** Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm or email [Email fis@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:fis@warwickshire.gov.uk)

FIRE SAFETY

In partnership with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue our Estates Team is working hard to ensure that all internal communal areas are kept safe and free from obstruction.

The Team carry out regular site visits to inspect each premises, frequently talking to residents about aspects of fire safety and delivering leaflets and letters.

Our priority is to keep people safe in their homes and therefore residents may see Estates Officers and Officers from the Community Fire Prevention Team on site in the coming months. Do feel free to chat with them and let us know if you need any further fire safety advice or information.



IS YOUR BOILER READY FOR WINTER ?

To help you ensure that your central heating system is working to its full capacity, we've put together some advice to help you safely test your boiler.

Testing your boiler

1. Turn on your central heating system
2. Turn the room thermostat right up, making sure that the boiler turns on. Don't forget to turn the thermostatic valves on your radiators up too
3. Wait 5-10 minutes. Carefully use your hand to check all the radiators in your home are warming up and there are no cold spots
4. Turn your thermostat down and get to know how the timer and room thermostat for your central heating system work
5. Consider having your heating on a constant low temperature (18°C) to prevent damp and condensation

If you spot any issues with your boiler or central heating system, please call us on **01926 456129** to log a repair as soon as possible.



DO YOU HAVE CONTENTS INSURANCE?

As your landlord the Council is responsible for your building insurance, but we do not cover your contents, furniture and decorations against fire, theft, vandalism or water damage such as burst pipes.

We've worked with an external provider to arrange a contents insurance scheme for our customers with benefits including:

- No excess payable on any claim
- Easy payment, either weekly, fortnightly, monthly or annually
- New for old cover (except clothing and household linen where an allowance for wear and tear is deducted).

There's also the option to extend the standard cover for accidental damage, wheelchairs, hearing aids, bicycles and belongings taken outside of the home.

To find out more about contents insurance please call **01926 454032** or email hsgfin@warwickdc.gov.uk

HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Look out on HomeChoice for the new Shared Ownership properties in Cubbington, eligible residents may be able to purchase 25% shares upwards.

Right to buy

The government's Right to Buy scheme gives most secure tenants the legal right to buy the council property they are living in at a discount of up to £82,800. For details information visit the gov.uk website.

LOCAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Are you worried about your energy bills this winter?

Did you know cold homes are a bigger killer than road accidents, drug or alcohol abuse?

You don't need to suffer with a cold home when help is available. Act On Energy is a local charity that can provide help and advice on all aspects of home energy efficiency, including support with fuel debt, access to hardship funds and switching energy tariffs.

Contact them for free today on **0800 988 2881** or email advice@actonenergy.org.uk

STAR SURVEY

We had a record response to the new Tenant Perception Survey with over 2,100 households giving their views and providing invaluable feedback on what we need to concentrate on in the next year. We also recognise that half of our residents didn't respond and will be reviewing what more can be done to ensure that every resident voice can be heard and responded to.

Bal Cheema - Customer Involvement Team Leader said

"I'd like to say a big thank you to all residents who took the time to complete the recent Tenant Perception Survey and for the 2,000 plus comments. It's going to take time, but we will be looking at each and every one to understand where or how we can make changes to improve the service."



77% Satisfied with the overall service provided by Warwick District Council



77% Satisfied that the Council provides a home a home that is safe and secure



79% Satisfied with repairs carried out in the last 12 months



70% Satisfied with the time taken to complete the repair after it was reported



61% Satisfied Council listens to views and comments



53% Satisfied that communal areas are clean, safe and well maintained.



61% Satisfied that Warwick District Council makes a positive contribution to your neighbourhood

UNHAPPY WITH OUR SERVICE? HERE'S WHAT TO DO.

We want to get it right! However if you've got a problem with our service, you may want to raise a formal complaint.

The quickest and easiest way to do this is by completing our online complaints form at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/complaints or emailing contactus@warwickdc.gov.uk.

If you are unable to raise a complaint by either of these methods please ask any member of housing services to assist you.

All information about Warwick District Council's complaints procedure is available on the website www.warwickdc.gov.uk/complaints

Did you know you can contact the **Housing Ombudsman** at any time for support in helping to resolve a complaint? The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law and is free, independent and impartial.

For advice and help to find a resolution, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman at any time while a complaint is going through our complaints process, although the Ombudsman cannot make a formal decision on a case at this stage.

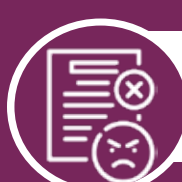
More information about the Housing Ombudsman, including contact details, can be found at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk



55% Satisfied how anti-social behaviour is dealt with



70% Satisfied that they know how to complain if they are not happy with the service they receive



55% Satisfied with the council's complaints handling



73% Satisfied with the advice and support received claiming housing benefit and welfare benefits