

North Warwickshire Borough Council Tenants' Newsletter

Welcome to this edition of Tenants Link

Welcome to your Winter Edition of Tenants Link. This newsletter is produced to provide you with information on Housing Services, work of the Borough Wide Tenants' Forum and good news stories. If you have any ideas that would interest other tenants or any good news stories you would like to include in the next edition.

Please contact Julie Richardson

☎ 01827 719402

✉ julierichardson@northwarks.gov.uk



New Homes North Warwickshire See page 7

How to contact us

You can contact us for a general enquiry in any of the following ways:

✉ housingservices@northwarks.gov.uk

☎ 01827 715341 between 8.30am and 5pm, Monday to Friday

Complaints and Compliments:

✉ complaintsandcompliments@northwarks.gov.uk

🌐 www.northwarks.gov.uk

Write to:

North Warwickshire Borough Council,
The Council House, South Street,
Atherstone, Warwickshire CV9 1DE.

Visit:

The Council House between 9am and 5pm,
Monday to Friday

Opening Hours

Monday 9:00-12:30 and 13:30-17:00

Tuesday 9:00-12:30 and 13:30-17:00

Wednesday 10:00-12:30 and 13:30-17:00

Thursday 9:00-12:30 and 13:30-17:00

Friday 9:00-12:30 and 13:30-17:00

We currently offer a face-to-face service **by appointment only**. If you need to book a face-to-face appointment, please call our Customer Services team on (01827) 715341.

We also have social media channels people can contact us on.



Maintenance News

The Council has a duty to safeguard the safety of its residents from fire risks. Regulations have been in place since 2005 and were updated in 2022.

To protect residents in flats, the Council is advised by the Fire and Rescue Service and an independent Fire Risk Assessor.

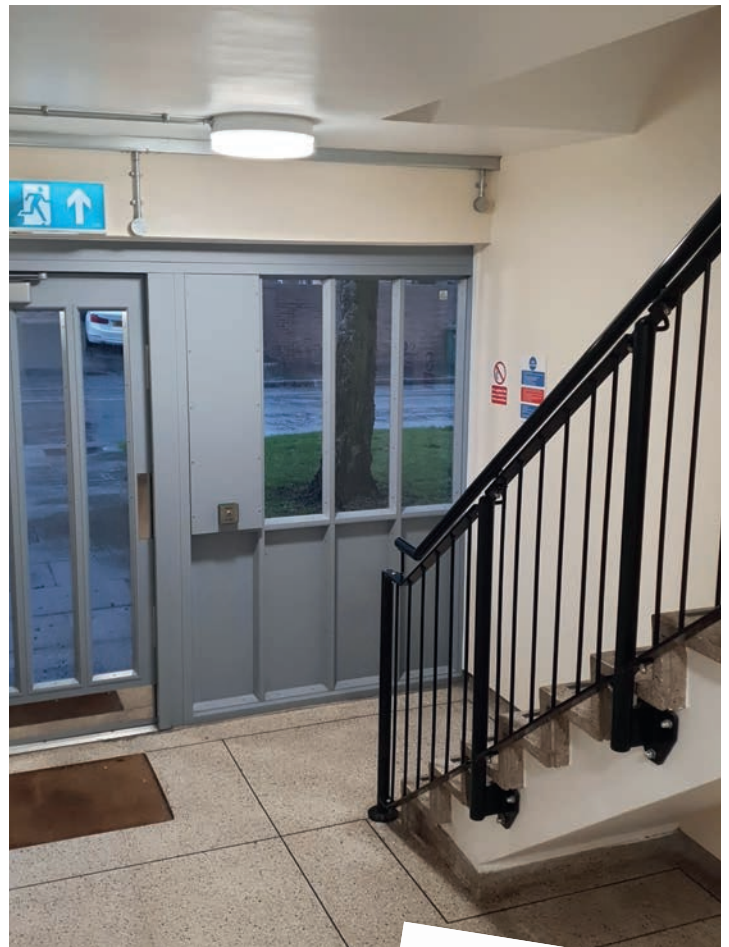
The recent advice we have received is that no personal items should be kept in common areas, on walkways or outside front doors. This is because items may pose a fire risk or create a hazard if there is a fire.

Our blocks of flats must be designed and managed to ensure that residents can be safe if there is a fire. We have equipment in place to assist with raising an alarm and staff check for possible hazards during their visits. We need your co-operation to ensure our buildings are safe.

Good housekeeping in communal areas of flats and maisonettes is important to keep you, your visitors, and your neighbours safe. Items which are combustible and could cause or fuel a fire or cause smoke should not be kept on landings. These areas are shared by everyone and should not be used to store household or personal items or to leave rubbish.

If you have unwanted items, you must leave them **inside your home** until you can arrange for safe, correct disposal or collection. An item left outside for a short amount of time could cause a safety hazard if there was a fire. We have 'no smoking' signs in all communal areas. It is an offense to smoke in an enclosed public space.

We have provided a leaflet for all residents in flats about fire safety. The leaflet is also on our website. If you would like more information or have concerns, please contact us. We are carrying out new Fire Risk Assessments and will update the safety advice when they are completed.





Reporting Damp and Mould Conditions

We need our tenants to report repairs and concerns about damp or mould conditions in your tenancy promptly so that we can address them. When we receive a report one of our surveyors will visit the property within 10 working days. They will complete an inspection, diagnose the reason for the problem and discuss concerns and actions with the tenant.

There are different causes of damp including;

- rising damp because of a defect in the floor or wall
- penetrating damp caused by a leak – from a gutter, roof, or chimney
- damp caused by condensation and need us to provide good ventilation installations to help reduce the effect of the excess moisture.

Whatever the reason we will work closely with our tenant to address the problem until it is resolved.

We produce a lot of condensation in our homes by everyday activities, so it is important to keep our homes warm and well-ventilated to reduce condensation and excess moisture. We understand that many tenants are concerned about the cost of using their heating systems. We have staff who can help tenants who are concerned about these costs and how they can afford them.

Whatever the solution proposed we will need a tenant's co-operation

to give us access to their home to provide the intervention to address the problem.

We have a leaflet available which gives advice to tenants when they are concerned about damp or mould conditions in their home. The leaflet is on our website visit www.northwarks.gov.uk/dampleaflet or we can post a leaflet out on request.

Report any concerns to us on 01827 715341.



Feedback

Our teams want to provide a good service. If we do something well it is great to have your feedback so that we know that we are on track and working to your expectations. It is also great for staff to know that their efforts are appreciated. We share compliments with the people concerned.

We don't want any of our tenants to experience a failure of our service. If it does happen we want to hear from you so that we can understand your concern and resolve it. Complaints are also an opportunity for us to learn about our customer's view of our service so please tell us what you are unhappy about or want us to change.

HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY

- On our website www.northwarks.gov.uk
- By email to complaintsandcompliments@northwarks.gov.uk
- By telephone to **01827 715 341**
- In writing

Our complaints procedure reflects the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the good practice guidance for complaint handling by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

We will follow our published procedure to endeavour to resolve a complaint. Further information can be found on our website www.northwarks.gov.uk/hcc



Introduction to our Tenancy Sustainment Officer

Deb Suffolk-Heath has taken on her new role alongside Glen Rowley as Tenancy Sustainment Officer.

Deb and Glen provide assistance to tenants who may be struggling to maintain their tenancy for a variety of reasons, for example a change in circumstances which has resulted in difficulty paying rent and other bills, or which has led to other difficulties within the home.

For further information contact 01827 715341 or email tenancysustainment@northwarks.gov.uk



Paying your rent over Christmas and New Year

Christmas is an expensive time of year, but there's a good reason to put paying the rent at the top of your Christmas to do list.

We know that there can be a great deal of pressure to spend a lot on presents and entertaining over Christmas and New Year, however, your rent must still be paid before, during and after the festive period.

Missing payments during December and January means that you will start the New Year in arrears, which ultimately puts you at risk of losing your home. It is important that you stick to a budget and pay your priority bills, which include rent, Council Tax and utilities.

We want to make sure that you are able to enjoy Christmas without having to worry about money problems, so here are some sensible steps you can take to help you stay out of debt:

- Decide how much you can afford to spend at Christmas in advance and stick to it – you will still then be able to make payments on essential bills such as rent.
- Could paying an additional week's rent in advance be a struggle? Continue paying your rent as normal but consider adding a little extra each time you make a payment. That way, you will be up to date, or even a little ahead when the New Year arrives.

- Make sure that you inform the relevant authorities e.g.. DWP, Housing Benefit, of any change of circumstances that may affect your benefit entitlement. This means you avoid any overpayments which you will need to repay.

- Do not be tempted to take a loan. It is important to avoid borrowing from people who you do not know well, such as colleagues, casual acquaintances, friends of friends, or people you recognise in your community or faith group. This is because they could be a loan shark. Loan sharks are illegal lenders who often target people who need to borrow money and cannot do so legally. They charge very high interest rates and should be avoided – even if you feel you have no other options. For further information www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/everyday-money/credit/how-to-spot-a-loan-shark

- It is important to stay in touch with us if you feel you might be under some financial pressure towards the end of the year. Are you already worried about being able to pay your rent? Please contact your Tenancy Services Officer on **01827 715341**, they are able to help you in different

ways such as working with you to agree a repayment plan, setting up a direct debit and referring you to organisations who provide support and money advice. This may include referring you to the Council's Tenancy Sustainment Team who can work with you to maximise your income, carry out benefit checks and refer you to financial inclusion projects. Do not delay contacting us, as soon as we hear from you we can start to work with you.

Your rent payments are due weekly and in advance. The easiest way to pay is via direct debit or bank standing order, if you need any help with setting these up, please contact us.

This year the pre-paid weeks are;
18 December 2023
25 December 2023

If you have rent arrears, you must continue to pay through these weeks. If you are up to date with your rent payments, you can take advantage and not pay through these weeks or continue to pay and get yourself ahead.

Cost of Living Help

Our website provides a lot of useful information about where to get help and financial advice, www.northwarks.gov.uk/costofliving. You will find links to all of the information below on the website. If you need any help, please contact the Tenancy Sustainment Team on **01827 715341**.

The UK Government has launched Help for Households to provide a range of additional support.

There is a partnership webpage that features **support for Warwickshire residents** including funds, programmes, and services to help you and your family get through this difficult time. There is a cost of living support line number: **0800 408 1449**.

It is also worth checking what support you may be eligible for if you or someone you care for has a disability. More information about disability benefits can be found on the government website www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/benefits



Financial support

- **Household Support Fund** – the Household Support Fund has been provided by the Government to local authorities to support families with children and individuals most in need.
- **Energy Bills Support Scheme** - households in England will receive a £400 discount to help with the cost of their energy bill from October onwards.
- Check if you're eligible for the **Warm Home Discount**
- **Cost of Living Payment** - you may be able to get a payment to help with the cost of living if you're getting certain benefits or tax credits.
- **Pensioner Cost of Living Payment** - a £300 payment that will be paid with Winter Fuel Payments to all pensioner households across the UK.
- **Disability Cost of Living Payment** - a £150 payment for those on an eligible UK disability benefit, in September.

'It All Adds Up' energy-saving campaign

The Government has launched the **'It All Adds Up' energy-saving campaign** to raise public awareness of actions that people can take to cut their energy bills. The campaign promotes steps to help households save money on their energy bills with top tips including:

- Reducing the temperature a boiler heats water to before it is sent to radiators (known as the boiler flow temperature) from 75°C to 60°C, which will not reduce the temperature of your home but could save around £100 annually
- Turning appliances off at the plug, which could save approximately £70 per year
- Reducing heating loss from the property by putting a draught excluder around doors or by adding clear film across windows, which could save around £60 a year

More energy advice can be found on our website www.northwarks.gov.uk/info/20064/help_and_advice/1589/energy_advice_and_help

New Homes North Warwickshire

The new properties, located in Coleshill Road, Atherstone were constructed using funding from North Warwickshire Borough Council and Homes England and consist of six, two-bedroom flats.

The properties which are located close to Atherstone town centre, are in keeping with the local area and provide much needed affordable homes in the Borough. All six properties have been allocated; we wish them all the best in their new homes.

One of the new tenants, Mr Temple, said how much he loves his new home and so do his children.



Mutual Exchange Scheme



HomeSwapper

We encourage tenants needing to move to join the Home Swapper mutual exchange scheme. It is free for you to join if you are a North Warwickshire Borough Council tenant. It may be quicker for you to find a new home this way rather than waiting for a transfer to another Council home depending on your need.

You will need to register on the website www.homeswapper.co.uk. If you need help doing this, please contact us. You will be asked to upload information about

your current home to the website, along with details of the type of home that you are interested in moving to. The website will then help you to find potential matches. You can use www.homeswapper.co.uk to look for a new home in any part of the country, not just North Warwickshire.

You should always visit the property before agreeing to a mutual exchange. You should also be aware that you will take on the tenancy responsibilities of the person you are swapping with, so

for example, you will have to pay the rent that they currently pay.

Once you have found someone to swap with, you will need to obtain permission from the Council before you can complete the exchange. We will usually agree to these requests however, we may refuse if for example, your home is too big or too small for the household you are planning to exchange with. **To request permission to complete a mutual exchange please contact your Tenancy Services Officer on 01827 715341.**



Borough Wide Tenants Forum

Tenants and Community Panel members were invited to attend the Borough Wide Tenants Forum Annual General Meeting held on 31st May 2023 at the Council House, Atherstone.

Roger Price opened the meeting to give his third AGM address as Chair of the Borough Wide Tenants Forum. Roger thanked those in attendance and gave an overview of the year to highlight some of the good work that has taken place.

'I would like to touch on what we have achieved over the last 12 months; our key achievements have been:

- *Reviewing the Council Housing Service Standards and Key Performance Indicators to ensure they meet the required regulatory requirements.*
- *Monitoring the Tenant Participation budget updates and quarterly performance information and made suggestions for improvement.*
- *Reviewing the Asset Management Plan for Council Housing.*
- *Reviewing and monitoring the complaints and compliments procedure for Council tenants. This has been a valuable source of information as it helps to identify where we need to make improvements or alter procedure, and equally importantly where we are getting things right.*
- *Focus on the cost of living rises and reviewing the information provided to tenants of where they can find help and support.*
- *Looking at what we can do to deal with our carbon footprint by reviewing and monitoring the actions for housing as stated in the Climate Change Action Plan.*

- *Reviewing the Tenant Partnership Agreement and Forward Work Plan. Also contributing to the Tenants Link Newsletter promoting the work of the forum.*
- *Looking at literature that goes out to tenants to ensure the language used is clear and concise.*

Currently we are engaged with the damp and mould conditions policy whereby all social housing providers will be held accountable for the identification of damp and mould in properties and to take the appropriate action.

We continue to work proactively to encourage new members and make a concerted effort to engage with our tenants especially the younger ones. We now use a variety of platforms such as Zoom and Teams to make meetings more accessible to all, in the hope we can attract more people to become involved. We noted that during lockdown, Community Panels around the borough stalled and for numerous reasons haven't recovered. We need to work to restore numbers and to get the groups engaged once more. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the work of the Borough Wide Tenants Forum, I look forward to working with you again this year in partnership with North Warwickshire Borough Council officers.'

Following the address, a vote took place proposing Roger Price as Chair and John Holt as Vice Chair of the forum.

Guest speaker for the event was Mandy Bygrave from Coventry & Warwickshire CDA who gave an interesting presentation on how best to beat cost of living rises and spoke of cost-of-living courses that are available to community groups. This is part of the Government

Multiply Project and is funded by Warwickshire County Council until March 2025. The courses offer skills for life and are delivered anywhere in Warwickshire.

The courses offer 3 available sessions:

Saving energy, saving money

Shop for less, cook on a budget

Balancing your budget, make your money go further

For more information or to arrange a session for a community group you are involved with, contact Mandy Bygrave on 07989982727 or email m.bygrave@cwda.co.uk

Following the speaker there was an opportunity for everyone to meet over light refreshments.





Borough Wide Tenants Forum Meeting Dates

Meeting Date	Time	Venue
15th November 2023	11am	The Council House, South Street, Atherstone, Warwickshire CV9 1DE
17th January 2023	11am	
20th March 2023	11am	

The Borough Wide Tenants Forum and officers of the Council have reviewed the Tenant Partnership Agreement, a new updated version is in place to view on the Councils website www.northwarks.gov.uk/tpa



The Agreement outlines how tenants can become more involved and have a greater say in the way Housing Services are delivered through a range of opportunities for involvement.

In addition to the Tenant Partnership Agreement, there will be a summary leaflet of involvement activities.

Local Tenants Meetings

We are pleased to be introducing tenant's meetings across the borough and will be sending out invitations for you to join us.

Local tenant's meetings give an opportunity to meet with tenants to gather feedback on community issues and housing services. Our aim is to provide an effective customer service and by tenants sharing their views and suggestions with us, provides valuable feedback for us to make improvements on our service delivery. We are equally interested to know when we get things right, we do appreciate you letting us know.

Look out for your invitation, we hope you can join us for an informal chat and refreshments. We look forward to meeting you.

The importance of Home Contents Insurance

The Crystal Insurance Scheme is designed for tenants and residents in social housing.

Your landlord is responsible for covering the building of your home; however, your landlord does not insure the contents of your home. It's up to you to decide whether you want to insure your home contents and personal possessions.

Home contents insurance provides cover for the contents of your home, including cover for items such as furniture, carpets, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures, and ornaments, against fire, theft, water damage, storms and floods and other perils.



Good News Stories

Coleshill Parkinson Café

Hudson Avenue communal room in Coleshill provides a comfortable and convenient venue for Coleshill Parkinson's Café.

Parkinson's is a neurological condition. It is degenerative, progressive, currently incurable, and the fastest growing neurological condition in the world. Around 145,000 people live with it in the UK. North Warwickshire is home to a significant number of people living with Parkinson's Disease.

Coleshill Parkinson's Café was set up for local people and their carers who are often isolated and lonely, it is now well into its second year. The first meeting was held in July 2022 at Coleshill Town Hall for people who had nowhere to go, to be able to meet others in the same situation. The



group then changed their venue to Hudson Avenue communal room where they meet on the third Tuesday of every month.

There is no membership fee and no set program, it's just a social occasion to look forward to. Plenty of tea, coffee, biscuits, and the occasional home-made cake are available. Costs are met by grants from Coleshill Town

Council and Warwickshire County Council.

New members quickly assimilate themselves into a friendly, compassionate group with a common interest in living as well as possible.

For more information on Coleshill Parkinson's Cafe please contact 01675 464832

Coleshill Twin Rivers

Coleshill Twin Rivers meet at Hudson Avenue communal room in Coleshill for their monthly Women's Institute meetings and craft sessions.

Throughout October, the group have been busily working to create a poppy cascade for Remembrance Day to display outside Coleshill Church from 5th November. Their hours of work reflected in a spectacular finished project.

Coleshill Twin Rivers Women's Institute hold meetings on the 4th Tuesday of the month from 7.30-9.30pm at Coleshill Town Hall. **Anyone who is interested or would like further information, contact twinriverswimembership@gmail.com**





Pete's Plot Gardening Tips

Hello, all gardeners, we hope your keeping well and in good spirits as the festive season approaches. Just because the sun has taken a back seat there are still plenty of things to do in and around the garden. Don't get me wrong, even I am reluctant to be outside in poor weather, so I have a system for what to do in the winter months depending on the temperature and the rainfall.

It's not too late to plant bulbs such as Tulips if it's done this month, plant in containers in a peat free compost with added grit for drainage and plant bulbs about twice their own depth. They will bring some spring cheer to the garden. You might still find some winter flowering bedding at local supermarkets or garden centres violas, pansies, and primula, to name a few.

There's still time for a bit of a tidy up, a few years ago garden programs would have us cut down anything that had gone over, but times have changed, and leaving seed heads for the birds and grasses for cover and foraging is a far more responsible form of gardening. I would recommend that you clean out old nesting material from nest boxes as birds will

roost over winter and will be more likely to use a familiar place to build their nests in the spring. Remember if it's very wet avoid treading on the beds or even the lawn as the lawn can be damaged by overuse, a hand full of grass seed sprinkled over bare patches sometimes takes at this time of year.

Of course, some days are just too wet, windy, and cold to inspire any outdoor activity. The older of us might remember the days of reading through seed catalogues, whilst our younger gardeners will be going online. There are still companies out there printing coloured catalogues and while sitting in the warm with a hot drink selecting your seeds and plants for next year, it puts you at the top of the list avoiding any "out of stock" issues. Finally in the greenhouse or conservatory keep an eye on plants you are over wintering, remove any yellowing leaves and keep a "tidy" area to prevent moulds and other fungal problems that can be about in this sort of environment.

Top tips

I have said this before but now is the best time to clean and service your tools and equipment ready for next year.

You can still sow some salad and veg seeds, they will need some warmth to germinate but dependant on the variety some do very well, just look for "winter variety" on the pack.

This year think about responsibly sourcing your Christmas tree or even buying a rooted tree to plant out in the new year.

On that note - Merry Christmas and good gardening.

Pete



Competition Winner

Thank you for taking part in our last competition, the lucky winner is Jackie Baldwin from Wood End who

entry into the Word Search competition.



Word Search

FIND THE HIDDEN WORDS TO
WIN £25
IN HIGH STREET VOUCHERS

Please return the completed entry form to :

Julie Richardson
The Council House, South Street,
Atherstone, Warwickshire, CV9 1DE

Name

Address

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Tel

- | | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| CHRISTMAS | SANTA | DECEMBER |
| SNOW | REINDEER | MISTLETOE |
| PRESENTS | MERRY | CELEBRATE |
| ELVES | STOCKING | TREE |

All correct entries will be placed into a prize draw. Closing date Friday 19th January 2024