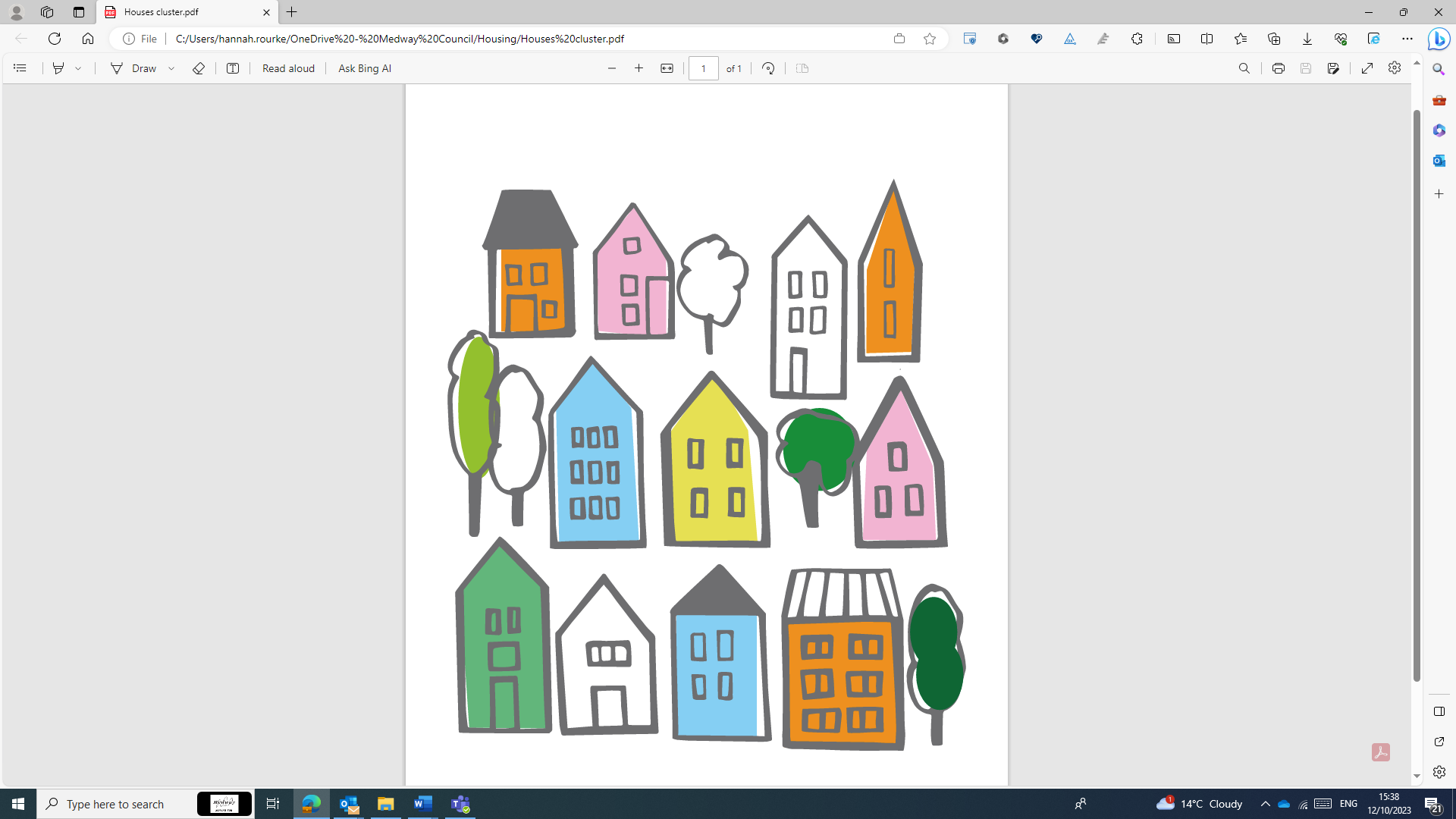


Medway Council Housing Services



Tenant’s Handbook

# **Welcome**

This handbook will provide all the information you need about your tenancy with Medway Council and your new home.

Medway Council Housing Services manage your tenancy and home in partnership with Mears, our repairs and maintenance contractor and Norse, our caretaking, grounds maintenance and cleaning contractor.

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# **Key Council contact details**

## **Housing Officer Duty Line**

To talk to a Housing Officer during normal working hours about your rent or any tenancy related matter phone: 01634 333344.

(Monday to Thursday 9:30am – 5pm. Friday 9:30am – 4:45pm)

Tenancy Team email: [housingtenancyteam@medway.gov.uk](mailto:housingtenancyteam@medway.gov.uk)

Income Team email: [housingincometeam@medway.gov.uk](mailto:housingincometeam@medway.gov.uk)

[Housing Services Website](http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing)

## **Housing Repairs**

For urgent or non-urgent repairs during normal working hours:

Phone 01634 333601 or freephone 0800 073 073 or email [housingrepairs@medway.gov.uk](mailto:housingrepairs@medway.gov.uk)

For emergency repairs outside of normal working hours phone 01634 304400

## **Medway Council General Enquiries**

Phone 01634 333333 (Monday – Friday 8am-8pm Saturday 9am – 1pm)

[Medway Council Website](http://www.medway.gov.uk/)

Address: Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, ME4 4TR

## **Medway Council, Council Tax**

Phone: 01634 332222

**Identification**

All employees of Medway Council and their contractors will carry identification which will include a photograph. Contractors should be wearing company-identifiable uniform and vehicles bear the company name. If you are in any doubt, please contact the Housing team on 01634 333344 who should be able to confirm whether the caller is genuine.

## **Other Contacts**

## **Kent Police**

Crime in progress, threat or concern for safety, phone: 999

Non-emergency number, phone: 101.

## **NHS for health concern (non-emergency)**

Phone: 111

**Social Care**

Concerns about an Adult, Child and for self-referral to the Occupational Therapy Team

Phone: 01634 334466

## **Gas Leak**

If you smell gas, phone Southern Gas Networks (SGN) immediately on 0800 111 999.

## **Water Leak (Outside property)**

If you’ve spotted a leak outside your property and you think it is putting either members of the public or property at risk, you can call Southern Water on 0800 820 999 (lines are open 24 hours). For non-urgent leaks you can report these on [the Southern Water website.](http://www.southernwater.co.uk/)

## **Power Loss**

If you, neighbours, and local streetlights are out it is likely to be a power cut. You can contact UK Power Networks to report and check their website for updates.

If you have a power cut phone: 105

[UK Power Networks website.](https://www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/)

# **Moving In**

## **Keys**

You will be given three sets of keys for each of the locks in your home when you sign your new tenancy. You will also be given fobs for any shared key fob systems such as entrance doors. If you require additional keys, you will need to arrange and pay for this yourself. Additional fobs will need to be purchased from us.

## **Turn on and Test.**

You will need to call Mears on 01634 333601 (choose option 1) to turn on and test the gas supply to your boiler so you can have access to heating and hot water. This must be done for your health and safety. The boiler cannot be used before it has been checked by our contractor.

## **Energy Supply**

Make a note of your gas and electric meter readings. You will have been shown where the meters are during the viewing of the property. Your gas and electric supply are provided by British Gas. Medway Council will notify British Gas when your tenancy starts, and they will contact you regarding your account.

If you do not wish to remain with British Gas you will need to notify them and contact the new supplier to set up an account.

## **Cookers**

Your new home will come with access points for your electric or gas cooker, however you will need to arrange and pay to have your electric or gas cooker connected. It is against the law for anyone other than a qualified electrician or Gas Safe engineer to carry out these connections for you.

## **Bin Collection**

To find out your bin collection day visit the Council’s [Waste Collection Day page.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/homepage/45/check_your_waste_collection_day)

## **Home Contents Insurance**

Ensure that you have home contents insurance for your property. Crystal Insurance Scheme specialise in home insurance for Local Authority Tenants. [Find out more.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200134/housing/1037/home_contents_insurance)

# **Changing your address checklist**

* Medway Council Housing Revenues and Benefits Service to update your Council tax.
* Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for benefits
* Water Supplier
* Gas/Electric Supplier/s
* Telephone/Mobile suppliers
* TV Licensing
* Broadband provider
* Health service such as GP/Dentist
* Your bank
* Childrens schools if applicable
* DVLA / Car Insurance
* Royal Mail [(redirect your mail).](https://www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection)

# **Paying your rent**

## **When do I pay my rent?**

You will be charged rent for 52 weeks of the year. Your rent is due weekly on a Monday; however, you can make an agreement with your Housing Income Officer to pay fortnightly, four weekly or per calendar month. Rent should be paid in advance according to how often you pay. For example, if you pay monthly your rent should be paid one month in advance.

You can request a rent statement by calling 01634 333344 or by checking your [Housing Online Account.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/housingaccount)

## **How can I pay my rent?**

* Direct debit (our preferred method)
* Standing order
* [On our website](https://payment.medway.gov.uk/public/HousingRents)
* Housing Online (HOL)
* Phone
* Allpay Payment Card

## **Housing Online (HOL)**

A Housing Online account allows you to pay your rent online, keep track of your rent account, view rent statements and see upcoming rent payments. It takes around 5 minutes to register. If you would like to register or find out more visit [Register for a Housing Online Account](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/816/register_for_a_medway_housing_services_online_account)

## **What happens if I don’t pay my rent?**

As a tenant, it is your responsibility to pay your rent in full and on time. This is stated clearly in the tenancy agreement that you sign when you become a tenant. If you do not keep up with your rent payments, it may lead to the Council seeking possession of your home, and you will be pursued for the money you owe. This will also reduce your chances of securing alternative accommodation. At the earliest stage of experiencing financial difficulty, please contact us so we can try to help you keep your home.

## **Claiming Benefits**

If you are entitled to claim Universal Credit to help towards your rent, you will need to visit the government website or visit the Job Centre to make a claim or change your address and payable rent. While you are waiting for your claim to be processed you need to be making payments towards your rent account.

Universal Credit replaces the following working-age benefits:

* Housing Benefit
* Income Support
* Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based)
* Employment and Support Allowance (Income Based)
* Working Tax Credit
* Child Tax Credit

If you currently get any of these benefits you will eventually be transferred onto the Universal Credit scheme.

## **Service charges**

A service charge is a charge for services we provide such as cleaning and lighting in shared areas. Not everyone will have service charges. Where service charges are applicable you will be advised of the amounts. This will be in addition to your weekly rent amount.

## **Managing your money**

To help manage your money you can use our income and expenditure form. Contact the Income Team on 01634 333344 or email [housingincometeam@medway.gov.uk](mailto:housingincometeam@medway.gov.uk)

## **Right to buy**

If you are a secure tenant and have been a public sector tenant (usually a tenant of a Council or a housing association) for at least 3 years, then you have the right to buy your home at a discount. The amount of discount you are entitled to depends on how long you have been a qualifying tenant. For more information about the scheme and how to make an application you can call 01634 333344 and ask to be put through to the Leasehold and Right to Buy Team or visit [our Right to Buy webpage.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/108/right_to_buy)

# **Your Tenancy**

## **Types of tenancy**

Introductory:

This is a 12-month trial given to all new tenants unless they had a secure or flexible tenancy with a social landlord immediately before taking on the new tenancy. We will review your tenancy over this period to make sure that you are not in breach of the terms of the tenancy. If we are not satisfied, then we may extend this period by a further six months and tell you why. If we refer you to court for not paying your rent or any other tenancy breaches such as causing anti-social behaviour, the court will grant a possession order to the Council. If you successful complete the 12-month period, you will be given a secure tenancy.

Secure:

As a secure tenant you have more rights such as the ability to undertake a mutual exchange (swap homes with another social housing tenant). Contact your housing officer for more information or access our policies online on our [Housing Services website.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing)

Flexible:

This tenancy is largely the same as a secure tenancy, but for a fixed term, usually for a period of five years (check this with your Housing Officer). Housing Services introduced flexible tenancies on 1 April 2014, with the aim of making the best use of housing properties. Some tenants will currently be on flexible tenancies, and these will become secure at the expiry of the flexible period. Medway Council now only uses flexible tenancies in limited circumstances.

Joint tenancies:

When two adults make an application for housing, we will usually offer a joint tenancy. Joint tenants are equally responsible for the tenancy and have the same rights. If one of the joint tenants breaks the tenancy agreement, we will take action against both tenants.

## **Tenancy Visits**

Your Housing Officer will visit you on a number of occasions dependent on the type of tenancy. Introductory tenants will be visited at 6 weeks, 6 months, and 9 months following the commencement of your tenancy. This helps us ensure you are managing your tenancy and helps identify any issues early on. It is important to keep to these visits as failure to do so could see your introductory tenancy extended for a further 6 months. A secure tenant would only be visited at 6 weeks following the commencement of the tenancy to review whether there are any issues, unless moving into a new build property.

## **When we can end your tenancy**

If you are a secure tenant, Medway Council can only end your tenancy if we obtain a court order. A court order will only be granted for certain reasons, known as grounds for possession which include breaching your tenancy agreement conditions.

Examples of things that would breach your tenancy agreement include:

* Not paying your rent
* You or anyone living with you or visiting you causing anti-social behaviour.
* You not allowing us, or our service provider, into your home to meet our responsibilities as your landlord including, but not limited to, inspecting the condition of your home, servicing your gas boiler, and carrying out repairs.
* The property not being your only or main home/loss of security of tenure.
* Breaches of other terms and conditions of your tenancy
* One of the mandatory grounds set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

## **Death of a tenant**

If you are a joint tenant and one tenant passes away, you will automatically succeed to the tenancy. You will need to contact Housing Services to inform them of the death and provide a copy of the death certificate. You can report this directly through the [Tell us Once Service.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200157/deaths/40/register_a_death/7#:~:text=Use%20the%20Tell%20Us%20Once%20service&text=Or%20phone%200800%20085%207308%20or%20using%20text%20phone%200800%20141%202218) Alternatively, you can speak with the Housing Service team if you have any concerns regarding what happens next. A Housing Officer will visit you to complete the paperwork required to change the tenancy into your sole name. Only one succession is allowed.

If you are residing in a property but not a named tenant, you may have the right to succession.

## **Succession of a tenancy**

In certain circumstances, when a tenant dies, their tenancy can pass on to someone else living in the home. This process is called a succession. If you think you have the right to take over a tenancy when a tenant has died it is important to contact us as soon as possible. You should not assume you will be granted succession and that everything will resolve itself. If you delay and depend on Housing Benefit/Universal Credit to pay your rent, you may run the risk of falling behind with payments because your benefits may not automatically be back dated.

When succession is granted, you succeed to the tenancy and not necessarily the current property. If the property would be under-occupied, you will be offered a suitable property to meet your need.

If you have no succession rights and you remain in the property following the death of the tenant, you will be set up as ‘use and occupation’ but will not have a tenancy. We will advise you on how to seek alternative housing. If you do not leave the property, we will take legal action through the Court to regain possession of the property.

## **Assignment**

Assignment is a way that tenants can transfer their tenancy to another person. On assigning your tenancy to someone else, you will no longer be a tenant and the assignee will become the tenant.

You must seek the permission of Medway Council Housing Services and we will consider all circumstances and advise whether an assignment can go ahead. The person you wish to assign the tenancy to must have lived at the property for more than 12 months. For further details contact your Housing Officer.

## **Tenancy Fraud**

If you don’t tell us that you’ve moved or ended your tenancy, you may end up owing outstanding rent. The Council will pursue this, and it will affect your chances of re-housing in future. By not using the property as your main residency you may be prosecuted for social housing fraud, which is a criminal offence. If you were claiming housing related benefits during this time you will also be prosecuted for housing related benefit fraud.

## **Subletting**

If you sublet the whole of your property to someone else, you will no longer be classed as a secure tenant and action will be taken to repossess the property. You may sublet a room in your property, but you should seek permission from Housing Services and also update any benefit claims you may have made. `

## **Lodgers**

Secure tenants have a statutory right to take in lodgers. The Council requests that you notify us if you take in a lodger. Lodgers are licensees without any exclusive right to the use of the property and will be treated as members of the tenant’s family.

## **Running a business from home**

You must request permission to run a business from your home and should contact your Housing Officer. You will likely be granted permission providing that there are no concerns about your business activities causing a nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours or local community.

You must not park any commercial vehicles on land owned by Medway Council Housing Services.

## **Pets**

You are not allowed to keep pets in your home without having written permission from your Housing Officer. Residents must register each of their individual pets. There are restrictions on the numbers and types of pets that you are allowed to keep, depending on your property type. You cannot keep a pet that is likely to be a danger or cause a nuisance to neighbours or visitors to the property. For more information contact your Housing Officer or see our [pet policy.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/3328/pets_policy)

## **When a pet passes away**

We appreciate the loss of any pet is a heartbreaking time, but we must remind residents that they must not bury any pet in their garden, communal gardens, or spaces. Our useful pet information contains details of some organisations that can help in this situation and can be requested from your Housing Officer.

## **Gardens**

The ongoing maintenance of any garden area is the responsibility of the tenant. Gardens must be kept tidy, with grass kept short. They must not be used to store rubbish, bulky items, or any vehicles. You are also responsible for any trees in your garden and must ensure they are maintained.

If your garden is considered untidy your Housing Officer will visit and ask you to tidy it. If you fail to do so in a reasonable time, you may be issued a Community Protection Warning (CPW). If the garden remains untidy a Community Protection Notice (CPN) could be issued with can result in fines and prosecution as well as tenancy enforcement actions. You may also be recharged for the costs to clear your garden.

If you are struggling to maintain your garden, you should seek help from relatives, neighbours, or a professional gardening service where possible. If this is not possible, you need to contact the Housing team as soon as possible.

## **Communal areas**

External communal areas are for the use of the surrounding properties. You must not fill communal areas with your own items in such a way that it prevents others from using the area.

You must not:

* Have swimming pools/hot tubs/spa pools in the communal area.
* Store BBQ’s, gas bottles and associated items
* Have trampolines or other large play equipment.

Internal communal areas must be kept clear to ensure access and escape routes are kept safe.

You must not leave or store anything in communal areas including:

* Rubbish and bulky items.
* Prams, buggies, or children’s toys
* Mobility scooters/electric scooters

You must not charge mobility scooters or electric scooters/bikes in communal areas; these must be charged appropriately inside your property. Please ensure you use the correct charging devices, as counterfeit chargers can be dangerous.

For more information on E-scooters visit Medway Trading standards [E-Scooter Guidance.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200160/roads_and_pavements/1397/e-scooter_safety_guidance#:~:text=It%20is%20illegal%20to%20ride,land%20with%20land%20owner%27s%20permission)

## **Condition of Property**

You must keep your property in a clean and tidy condition and must not damage or vandalise it in any way. If you fail to do so, you may be in breach of your tenancy conditions and action may be taken against your tenancy.

If you are unable to manage your property you need to contact your Housing Officer straight away so that they can discuss options with you and make referrals for support.

## **Pest Control**

Pests include:

* Ants
* Bedbugs
* Cockroaches
* Fleas
* Mice
* Pigeons
* Rats
* Wasps

For more information you can view a [Guide to pests](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200329/pest_control_at_home/925/guide_to_pests)

You should report pests to Housing Services as soon as possible. You can arrange your own pest control. If you are unable to do so you can discuss this with Housing Services to see what options are available. Treatment may be arranged and recharged to you if it is felt the issue has occurred due to lifestyle concerns such as allowing rubbish to accumulate. If the issue occurs in communal areas, a whole block may be affected. Housing Services will arrange pest control treatments and any remedial works required after treatment.

## **Renting a garage**

Medway Council has a number of garages in various locations in Rainham, Gillingham and Twydall. We offer a reduced rate to Medway Council tenants. If you would like to rent a garage you can apply on our website. If a garage is unavailable in your desired area, you may be added to a waiting list. Please note our waiting list is currently closed due to a high number of applications.

## **Getting on with your neighbours**

Medway Council believes everyone has the right to live in their home without major disturbance. It can be helpful to advise your neighbours if you plan to have a one-off party or if you are having works done so they are aware that there may be some noise. Being considerate will help everyone get along and makes for a happier neighbourhood.

## **Good Neighbour Agreements**

A good neighbour agreement is a tool used by Medway Council to help tackle anti-social behaviour. It outlines the expectations and responsibilities of our tenants within their communities to ensure that everyone can enjoy living in their homes. It is a pledge to maintain a respectful and peaceful environment free from nuisance behaviour such as excessive noise, property damage or anti-social behaviour. These will be used on a trial basis for new tenants moving into blocks of flats or our Homes for Independent Living Schemes whilst we review their use.

## **Anti-social behaviour**

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) can cover a range of behaviours that have a negative impact by creating nuisance, alarm, or distress.

The following can cause annoyance or inconvenience but are not automatically considered ASB.

* A one-off party
* Cats roaming or fouling.
* Children crying or playing.
* Cooking odour
* Disputes on social media
* Dog roaming or fouling
* General household living noise at reasonable hours such as a door slamming
* Gossiping in the street
* Inconsiderate parking on the public highway
* Lifestyle clash
* People being rude or giving you a ‘funny or dirty’ look.
* Neighbour disputes

Use our [ASB Toolkit](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/81/council_tenant_anti-social_behaviour/2) to help you determine what is or is not considered ASB.

Unfortunately, building a case for anti-social behaviour takes time. It may appear that there is no action occurring, but this is often not the case. Housing Services work behind the scenes with partner agencies to gather evidence and the court process also takes time.

## **Keeping a record**

Anti-social behaviour can have a huge impact on people’s lives, and we understand that being asked to fill in diary sheets can be frustrating as it doesn’t provide an immediate solution. They are however hugely important in helping us to investigate.

## **How diary sheets help us:**

* Diary sheets give us a clearer understanding of the types of behaviour that are occurring and when, which may lead to a better opportunity for witnessing the behaviour.
* They also give us the chance to identify any patterns in behaviour which will help us investigate and work to prevent the behaviour from reoccurring. To enable us to take action against a perpetrator of anti-social behaviour, we require evidence. A court of law will only act if we can provide strong evidence that proves that the behaviour is occurring.
* Our diary sheets ask how the behaviour impacted you because we must prove that the anti-social behaviour is having a detrimental effect on your lives and the local community.

## **The ASB App**

If you report anti-social behaviour to Medway Council Housing Services, you may be given access to the ASB App. The App allows you to report incidents of ASB in real time without having to wait for our offices to open. You can add photo’s, videos and noise recordings as well as uploading diary sheets. The App is another tool we provide to make reporting incidents of ASB easier for our tenants.

You can find out more on the [ASB App website.](https://asbapp.co.uk/)

## **When the Council will not take action:**

* If we do not consider a complaint to be anti-social behaviour
* If no one is willing to keep diary sheets and/or to attend court, if required
* When the dispute is between two neighbours and there is insufficient evidence to support either party's allegations
* If the complaints are considered to be unreasonable, taking into account the nature of the alleged nuisance and the mix of property and family types in the area.

## **Community Protection Warning (CPW)**

Housing Services have the power to issue CPW’s to combat anti-social behaviour. They can be issued to anyone over the age of 16 whose conduct is:

* Having a detrimental effect on the quality of life in the local community
* persistent
* unreasonable

CPW’s may be used for issues such as motor vehicle nuisance, noise nuisance, untidy gardens, and other anti-social behaviours.

A CPW will be issued in writing, it will make clear what the problem behaviour is and what should be done to change it. If you are issued with a CPW and anything is unclear you should contact the officer that issued it. The officer will monitor the situation to see if the behaviour stops. If it does, no further action will be taken.

**If the CPW is not effective a Community Protection Notice (CPN) may be issued.**

## **Community Protection Notice (CPN)**

Housing Services can issue a CPN if they have secured evidence to show that the behaviour previously highlighted in the CPW is continuing.

The CPN may ask you to:

* Stop doing specific things.
* Do specified things.
* Take reasonable steps to achieve specified objectives.

The officer will continue to monitor the situation. If the requirements of the CPN are kept, then no further action will be taken.

## **Breaching a Community Protection Notice**

Breaching a CPN is a criminal offence. If appropriate, a fixed penalty notice can be issued. It can also put your tenancy at risk.

## **Injunctions**

An ASB injunction is an order that can be applied for to prevent someone from engaging in anti-social behaviour. They are granted for a specific time and can contain positive requirements, actions that can be taken to prevent further anti-social behaviour. Injunctions can also be applied for in cases where a tenant is preventing safety and compliance works.

## **Demoted Tenancies**

If you cause a nuisance or anti-social behaviour, Medway Council can apply to the Court to demote your secure tenancy to a 12-month probationary tenancy. You will have reduced security of tenure during this period. You do not lose your home and can regain your original secure tenancy after 12 months. In some cases, the period can be extended to 18 months. Medway Council can seek a demotion order in possession proceedings as an alternative claim to a possession order. If you continue to exhibit unwelcome behaviours whilst on a demoted tenancy, Medway Council could apply for your eviction. Whilst we must still apply to the Court, there is often no need to provide a ground for possession.

## **Family Intervention Tenancies**

These tenancies were created as a means to work with families who have been involved in anti-social behaviour. They can only be offered for the purposes of offering behavioural support services to tenants against whom a possession order has:

* Been made in relation to a secure tenancy on the grounds of anti-social behaviour.
* Could have been made in relation to a secure tenancy.
* Could have been made if the tenant had this tenancy on the ground of anti-social behaviour.

They do not provide any rights to succession nor offer tenants any long-term security. They can be terminated by Medway Council following the correct procedure.

## **Mandatory Grounds for Possession**

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced new absolute grounds for possession of secure tenancies where relevant criteria was met. If a tenant or someone living at the property is found guilty of a serious offence in or within the locality of the property, Medway Council could apply for possession on absolute grounds. If the ground is proven a judge must grant possession and you will be evicted from your property.

Grounds for possession can be considered if a tenant, a member of the tenant’s household or a person visiting the property has met one of the following conditions:

* Convicted of a serious offence (specified in section 2A to the Housing Act 1985)
* Breach of a civil injunction
* Convicted of breaching a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO)
* Convicted for breaching a noise abatement notice.
* The tenant’s property has been closed for more than 48 hours under a Closure Order for anti-social behaviour.

Secure tenants have the statutory right to request a review of the landlord’s decision to seek possession.

# **Vulnerability, Help and Support.**

If you consider yourself or someone living with you as vulnerable you should let Housing Services know as soon as possible. This will allow us to look at any extra support we may be able to provide or other agencies we can refer to for advice and support.

If you are concerned about a child, you can contact [Children's Services](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200170/children_and_families)

Other information, activities, and support services for young people can be found in the [Youth Directory.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200606/youth_services_directory)

If you are concerned about yourself, someone that lives with you or a neighbour you can contact [Adult Social Care.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200169/adult_social_care) This may include reporting if you or someone else is having difficulty undertaking day to day tasks, can no longer keep the property in a clean and sanitary condition or if others are taking advantage of you or someone else. You can also talk to your Housing Officer who may consider what is happening and make referrals based on their professional judgement.

There are also many organisations to support adults with various aspects from disability to social activities, a list can be found [here.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200139/social_care_and_health)

## **Cost of Living Support**

It can be a challenge to manage finances and household bills. Everyone has been affected by the cost-of-living crisis due to rising fuel, energy, and food costs. There is many different forms of help and support available and these are listed on Medway Council’s [Help for Households Page.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/householdhelp#:~:text=Financial%20support%20is%20available%20to,you%20with%20essential%20household%20costs)

There is also a Household Support Fund that provides support to vulnerable households in Medway.

The fund can be used for:

* Food and home essentials
* School uniforms
* Energy
* Water
* Essentials linked to energy and water.
* Housing costs in exceptional circumstances.

The fund is available to everyone who lives in Medway including those who are not currently in receipt of benefits and who are not eligible for public funds.

For more information and to apply for support visit the [Household Support Fund webpage.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200131/council_tax_and_benefits/1481/household_support_fund)

## **Adaptations**

If you are finding it difficult to move around your home and to undertake daily tasks due to disability, you may benefit from adaptations to your property. You will need to contact the Occupational Therapy (OT) team to make a self-referral by calling 01634 334466. They will visit you at home to undertake an assessment. The assessment will look at your current home, the nature of your disability and if relevant the needs of your family and carers. There will also be a financial assessment to see whether you may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant. If the assessment indicates that you are likely to be eligible, you will be referred to Medway Council’s Disabled Adaptation Service. An Adaptations Officer will visit you to look at proposed works and ensure they are reasonable and practicable.

## **Hoarding**

Housing Services understands that hoarding is a recognised condition that is often very complex. It is important to ensure those that are hoarding receive the help and support they need whilst also ensuring the safety of those living in nearby properties. Hoarded properties can pose a significant risk to those living in them, with fire risk, the risk of falling items and the lack of an easy means of escape. In the event of a fire, stored items could cause the fire to spread rapidly posing a risk to neighbouring properties.

Housing services will work with partner agencies to encourage those that have hoarded to clear the property and to put support in place to ensure it does not become hoarded again. If a tenant does not engage with us or another supporting agency, we may need to take enforcement action to remedy the situation.

If you, a relative or a neighbour (living in a Medway Council property) is hoarding please report this to Housing Services immediately to ensure we can put measures in place to reduce any risks and provide help and support where needed.

# **Moving on**

If you are moving out of your home, you must contact your Housing Officer and give Medway Council notice in writing that you wish to terminate your tenancy. Termination forms can be requested from your Housing officer or completed online on our [ending your tenancy page.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200134/housing/94/moving_home/2)

Unless you are moving to another Medway Council property you must give us at least 4 weeks’ notice beginning on a Monday. You will be responsible for paying your rent until the end of your notice period. A visit will be arranged by a building inspector and Mears to inspect the property before the end of your tenancy.

The building inspector and Mears’ visit will allow us to:

* Identify and agree with you any repairs that you will need to undertake before handing back the keys to your property, to avoid being recharged for the works.
* Identify and agree on any improvements you have made to the property which you might be able to get compensation for.
* Allow us to identify and notify contractors of any repair work that the property needs before it’s re-let.

## **Mutual Exchange**

A mutual exchange allows secure tenants to swap their property with another social housing tenant. You can swap with tenants who have a different social landlord, and you can move anywhere in the UK. You can also have 2 or more exchange partners.

If you are interested in a mutual exchange, you can join the Home Swapper website to help you find someone to swap with.

If you wish to undertake a mutual exchange you must apply to Medway Council.

[Medway Council Mutual Exchange Application and Guidance.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2617/mutual_exchange_application_and_guide_2017)

All parties will need to complete application forms for each landlord. Once all forms have been received, Medway Council has 42 days to make a decision on whether the exchange can proceed or not. During this period Medway Council will request a reference from the incoming applicant’s landlord, carry out a property inspection of your property, carry out an electrical check of your property and your Housing Officer will visit. The property inspection will determine whether there are any works required to be carried out by you prior to the exchange being agreed.

An exchange may be refused if your property is in poor condition, if there are outstanding debts, or if the incoming applicant has poor references. If an exchange is refused, you will be notified in writing with the reasons explained.

You must not swap without permission. If you do this, you may lose your secure tenancy as well as the property you have moved to.

## **Tenant’s Incentive Scheme**

The Tenant’s Incentive scheme helps Council tenants move to a smaller home. We understand that personal circumstances can change, and your current home may not meet your needs any longer. Families grow up, children move out and tenants can be left in a property that is:

* Difficult to manage.
* Difficult to clean.
* Expensive to heat
* No longer meets your requirements.

If any of the above applies to you and you are willing to move to smaller accommodation, you may be entitled to an incentive payment.

To qualify for this scheme, you must be a secure tenant of Medway Council and your property must be suitable for re-letting to a family (this includes houses, flats, and maisonettes).

How does it work?

Tenants who want to move through this scheme are awarded band A priority on the Housing List. This means there is a good chance of moving to a property of their choice. You are given this priority if you currently have more bedrooms than you need and are willing to move to a property with less bedrooms.

When is payment made?

Payment is made after you have moved into your new home. If you owe any money to Medway Council for rent related debt or repairs this will be deducted from any money that you are eligible for. Payment is made through a BACS payment directly into your bank account.

To find out more contact your Housing Officer.

# **Repairs**

## **What the Council are responsible for**

The most common items that we must keep in a good state of repair are:

* The structure (walls and supports)
* Fire bricks and fire backs
* The roof
* Heating systems
* Windows and glazing
* Kitchen worktops and fittings
* External doors and glazing
* Door frames and skirting boards
* Chimneys
* Tiles and other floor coverings (as originally fitted)
* Window catches
* Boundary fences and walls (excluding gates)
* External door locks
* Essential access paths and steps
* Pipes, taps and fittings
* Drainage, gutters, and external pipes
* Water tanks and cylinders
* External decorations
* Sinks
* Cubbyholes and sheds we own
* Basins
* Stairway lighting, entry phone and shared TV aerials
* Shared parts of blocks of flats (corridors, stairways, passageways and accessways)
* Toilet pans and cisterns
* Baths or showers
* Fire equipment
* Wiring
* Door closers
* Switches, lighting, and power points

## **What you are responsible for**

The main things that you must keep in good condition and repair or replace as necessary are:

* Keys
* Roller blinds and curtain rails
* Sink, bath and basin plugs, and chains, choked internal pipes and traps, and tap washers.
* Floor coverings, including laminate floorings.
* Internal door furniture
* All decorations inside your home
* Minor repairs to kitchen units
* Minor cracks in plaster
* Electrical plugs and fuses and fitting for all appliances
* Dustbins
* Light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, fuses, and wired fuses to fuse boxes.
* Clothes lines or rotary dryers (unless we have provided them in a shared drying area)
* Internal glazing
* Gates and gardens

## **Emergency repairs**

In an emergency you may require our out of hours service. Housing Services will respond to an emergency repair within either two hours or one working day depending on the severity. To be classified as an emergency repair, there must be a significant risk to health and safety, a risk to buildings, or a risk that other properties will be damaged, for example a total loss of electric power or a risk of flood.

The types of repairs considered to be an emergency are:

* total loss of electric power
* unsafe, broken or missing electrical fittings (not simply defective)
* total loss of gas supply
* gas leak on the property side of the meter
* a blocked, damaged, or defective flue to an open fire or gas appliance
* total loss of space heating or water heating (between 1 November and 31 March only)
* A blocked toilet pan (when property has one toilet only or if one toilet and disabled tenant/resident) and/or there is blocked soil stack or blocked foul drain in danger of potential back surge
* a leak from a water supply pipe, heating pipe, tank, or cistern
* boarding up of a broken window or door

## **Urgent Repairs**

We will respond to urgent repairs within three or seven working days depending on the type of repair. An urgent repair is where your comfort is substantially affected or delay may cause the building to deteriorate, for example rotten timber flooring, a loose handrail or minor leak.

## **Non-urgent Repair**

We will respond to non-urgent repairs, which do not severely affect your comfort, in 20 working days – for example the repair of a fence.

## **Gas Leaks**

If you smell gas, phone the National Gas Emergency Service immediately on 0800 111 999.

In the meantime, you should:

* turn off the gas at the meter.
* open windows and doors to increase ventilation.
* put out any naked flames.
* do not turn any electrical switches or sockets on or off.

## **Out of hours**

The Out of Hours Repairs Service is a ‘make safe’ service and could involve a temporary repair being done before arrangements are made by Housing Repairs to carry out a more permanent repair. If the property is not in a suitable condition for you to remain there an alternative can be sort by yourself (such as staying with family or friends) or we will look at placing you somewhere temporarily. If we have forced entry due to an emergency while you were away from the property and a lock change has been required, you will need to call the out of hours service to arrange the collection of your keys or seek an alternative place to stay and contact Housing Services the next day.

## **Decant**

If there has been significant damage to your property, such as a large leak or fire, we may need to decant you to an alternative property temporarily. We will identify a suitable property and we will make arrangements to provide you with the keys. You will still hold the tenancy at your original address and must continue to pay the rent.

## **Damp and Mould**

Damp and mould can be caused by many things. Condensation damp is the most common and is caused by day to day living. When water vapour or moisture from inside a property meets colder surfaces such as windows or walls the resultant condensation may soak into the wallpaper or paintwork. Damp areas attract black mould that grows on its surface. It is often found in corners or areas where there is little air circulation such as behind wardrobes.

You can reduce condensation by:

* Leaving a window open and using an extractor fan when cooking
* Ensuring washing is hung outside where possible or if it must be dried inside, open a window and close the door of the room where clothes are drying to allow moisture to escape outside.
* Wipe windows and windowsills of your home every morning to remove condensation.
* Open the bathroom window and/or keep the extractor fan on while taking a shower or bath.
* Keep window trickle vents open. These are designed to ventilate your home without causing a draught.
* Try to keep a medium to low level heat throughout the day during cold weather. Heating one room to a high level will make condensation worse in other areas.

Mould can also be caused by an issue with the fabric of the building such as a leak. These can sometimes be difficult to locate.

If you have damp and mould in your property, you should report this immediately. Our Asset Inspector will arrange a visit to assess the mould and advise on steps to resolve the issue. We may need to undertake works to treat the mould and we will work with you to prevent it in future.

## **Recharges**

If you, a member of your household, or a visitor damages the property meaning it needs to be repaired by Medway Council, you may be liable for the costs of these works.

Where possible we will advise if the repairs are rechargeable when you first report it to us. However, if you do not advise us the repair is required due to the action of you, your household, or visitor, but this is identified when the workman attends, you will still be charged for these works. You may also be responsible for costs faced by Medway Council or neighbouring tenants if your actions or those of your household or visitors cause damage to neighbouring properties. For example, a leak caused by you, or your facilities causes damage to another tenant’s property.

## **Right to repair (Secure tenants only)**

You can use the Right to Repair scheme to carry out work when our repair service is not of an acceptable standard.

Qualifying Repairs

Under the Right to Repair scheme you are entitled to compensation from us if we do not complete particular repairs within a specified time limit. Repairs that qualify under the scheme are mostly minor repairs costing up to £250.00 which affect the health, safety and security of you or your household and are classed as urgent. Examples may include:

* Unsafe power or lighting sockets or electrical fittings
* Blocked flue to an open fire, gas fire, or gas boiler
* Leaking roof
* Toilets that do not flush (where there is no other working toilet in the property)
* Blocked sink, bath, or basin.
* Leak from a water or heating pipe, tank, or cistern.
* Loose or broken handrails.

## **Property Alterations**

You will need permission to make certain improvements to your home. If you are considering alterations, you will need to fill in a property alteration form so that our Property Services team can review the request and decide whether to grant permission. If permission is denied you will be informed of the reasons why.

For more information visit our [property alterations page.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/89/information_for_council_tenants/2)

## **Handy man service**

The handyman is a skilled person who has the tools and equipment needed to carry out works. They can help customers by carrying out small jobs, to a maximum of 2 hours per year, free of charge. The service will focus on any small jobs around the house that do not require immediate attention and fall outside of contracted repair works. Customers will need to provide the materials for any job undertaken.

To qualify for the handyman service, you must fall into the following criteria:

* Must have a clear rent account or be keeping to a repayment plan.
* No record of anti-social behaviour (ASB)
* Have allowed us to carry out gas servicing and planned maintenance to your home without obstruction.
* Compliancy with your tenancy agreement.The service will be able to:
* Adjust internal doors or external gates.
* Ease and adjust cupboard doors.
* Small areas of painting or tiling.
* Hang pictures, curtain rails, blinds (that are already cut to size), and mirrors.
* Assemble flat pack furniture.
* Refix floor coverings.
* Fit or renew non-electric doorbells.
* Renew a toilet seat or fit a plug and/or chain to bath or sink.
* Complete minor gardening work.
* Put up a washing line to existing posts or hooks.
* Bleed radiators.
* Put up shelves, fit wall brackets, or hanging baskets.
* Trim internal doors to allow new carpet or flooring to be laid.
* Change light bulbs.
* Remove or replace lampshades, curtains, and pelmets.

The handyman cannot complete any gas or electrical works.

To book the handyman service please phone 0800 0730 3000

# **Compliancy**

## **Gas Servicing**

We are responsible for carrying out a yearly safety check on the gas appliances belonging to us in our properties. When the gas safety check is due you will be sent a letter with an appointment time. If this is not convenient then you should contact Mears to arrange an alternative time. If you are not in at the arranged time, the engineer will leave a card, asking you to make contact and arrange another visit. A further letter will be sent for you to make immediate contact if we do not hear from you. If we still hear nothing a formal final notice will be issued warning that legal action may be taken to access your home. Formal action involves referring your case to the Magistrates Court to obtain an entry warrant to gain access to your home to carry out the gas servicing. We will charge you for the cost of the court entry warrant and for gaining access into your property.

## **Electrical Testing**

We are also responsible for undertaking electrical safety testing every 5 years. You will receive a letter from Mears with an appointment. If the appointment is not convenient, you must contact Mears to rearrange. As with gas servicing, if you do not allow access, we will take legal action to gain access to your home. Any forced entry will incur a charge to you.

## **Smoke Alarms**

You should test your smoke alarms once a week to ensure they are working. This is done by pressing the test button on the outside of the casing.

The majority of Medway Council homes are fitted with a mains operated smoke alarm. Although they are mains powered, they contain a battery back-up to ensure they continue to work in case of an electrical power failure. The battery is contained within a sealed unit and should last approximately 10 years. If you find that your smoke alarms are not working, you should contact Mears immediately to make an appointment for an electrician to attend. Medway Council has a programme for replacing smoke alarms. You must allow access to your property to allow smoke alarms to be fitted.

When decorating, you should temporarily cover your smoke detectors to prevent a build-up of dust that can cause false alarms. Ensure these are uncovered as soon as possible.

## **Fire Safety**

It is important to be aware of what you must do in the event of a fire in your property or block of flats.

## **If the fire is not in your home:**

If you hear the fire alarm and the fire is not in your home, it is usually safe to stay put. Be alert during this time and if heat or smoke begin to affect your home or you are instructed to leave by a fire officer, close all doors, and leave the building immediately.

If you live in a block of flats, you will either have a stay-put or evacuation policy, this will be confirmed on a sign, visible inside the block. If you are unsure, please contact Housing Services to confirm. If the instruction is to stay put, fire doors should protect your property for 30 minutes. This ensures routes are kept clear for the fire service to tackle the fire and to rescue anyone at risk and they will safely evacuate you. If your block has an evacuation plan you need to close all doors and leave immediately.

## **If the fire is in your home:**

If you find a fire in your home raise the alarm by contacting the Fire Service by dialling 999/112, ensure all occupants leave, close all doors including the front door. Leave the building as quickly as possible by the safest route avoiding the location of the fire and go to a safe place.

## **If you are in a communal area and there is a fire:**

Raise the alarm and leave the building by the escape route and ring the Fire Service. Make your way to a safe place as far away from the building as possible or to a designated assembly point. Stay there until the fire officer/member of staff informs you the building is safe to re-enter.

## **Fire Prevention**

* No smoking is allowed in any of the communal areas.
* Do not overload plugs/sockets in your property and take care when using multi-way adapters.
* Keep cooker and heaters clear of dust and dirt.
* Never use any faulty electrical items
* Never leave hot appliances unattended when switched on.
* Do not place anything that will burn next to a heat source.
* Never leave candles unattended.
* Do not store materials, wedge doors open or block doorways in your property or communal areas.
* Keep gas and electricity meter cupboards clear.
* Check and test your smoke detectors regularly.

To make your home safer and reduce the risk of harm from a fire you can visit the [Kent Fire and Rescue Service website](https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/) where you can also arrange a Home Safety Visit.

## **Carbon Monoxide alarms (CO Alarms)**

If your CO alarm sounds continuously, you should turn off any gas appliances you are using and switch the gas off at the meter (turning the handle a quarter turn). Then ring Mears Gas Team on 01634 333601 (choose option 1).

## **Water Hygiene / Legionella**

Legionella is a bacteria which in some conditions can cause illness if someone breathes in small droplets of water suspended in the air containing this bacteria. It causes serious illness such as Legionnaires’ disease, which is a type of pneumonia.

If your property has been empty for a while (e.g., after a holiday), flush the whole water system for at least 2 minutes. First flush the toilet, then let the kitchen taps and the hand basin taps run for at least 2 minutes to let both hot and cold-water pass through. You should also flush an outside tap if you have one. If your shower has not been used for a week or more, run water from both hot and cold supplies through the shower hose and shower head for 2 minutes. To ensure no spray escapes run it through a bucket of water or water already in the bath.

## **Asbestos**

Asbestos was widely used in construction in the UK from the 1940’s until 1999, when it’s use was prohibited by law. Asbestos is still widely found in properties throughout the country but in the vast majority of cases it poses no health risks at all. Asbestos is only a health risk in its fibrous form because it can become airborne. If it is inhaled, it can cause serious health problems. Taking this into account, asbestos in your home is safe unless disturbed, damaged, or it begins to breakdown with age and releases fibres into the air. If you believe this to be the case in your home, you should urgently contact Mears, who will be able to advise you.

Things to note:

* It is best to leave asbestos-containing products where they are if they are in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed.
* Try to make sure anything containing asbestos remains in good condition.
* Do not drill, saw, or scrub anything you think may contain asbestos.
* Asbestos is no longer used in construction or in goods such as toasters or hairdryers in this country. However imported goods could still contain asbestos.

If you are planning home improvements and think you may have asbestos in your home, always talk to us first. We can check our records and tell you if any asbestos is present or arrange for our specialist contractors to carry out an asbestos survey.

# **Planned Works**

We invest in Council homes and Housing Services owned land to insure it meets health and safety standards and has a positive impact on the lives of our residents.

Programmes to improve and update your home include:

* Kitchen replacements
* Bathroom replacements
* Boiler replacements
* Replacement front, rear and patio doors
* Roof replacements
* Electrical rewiring

Your home will be included on a programme where it is deemed that the lifespan of the current item (such as the kitchen or roof) is coming to an end. You will be notified when works are due and advised what will happen next.

# **Homes for Independent Living**

## **Our schemes**

Medway Council Housing Service manages 8 Homes for Independent Living schemes. These include:

* Brennan House, Victoria Street, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 1EJ
* Esmonde House, Flaxmans Court, Brompton, Kent, ME7 5AN
* Longford Court, Longford Close, Rainham, Kent, ME8 8EN
* Marlborough House, High Street, Rainham, Kent, ME8 8AF
* Mountevans House, Skinner Street, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 1LA
* St Marks House, Saxton Street, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 5TW
* Suffolk Court, Suffolk Avenue, Rainham, Kent, ME8 7LB
* Woodchurch House, Woodchurch Crescent, Twydall, Kent, ME8 6XN

The schemes are for those aged 60 and over, who wish to remain independent whilst also having access to communal facilities, social opportunities, a Scheme Support Officer and a 24-hour Lifeline in place for support where needed.

## **Scheme Support Officers**

Each scheme has an allocated Scheme Support Officer. They will be able to help residents live independently. They will complete an assessment to assess any support needs you may have, liaise with agencies such as social or health services and help with budgeting and managing finances. They can also help you understand your tenancy obligations and rights, help report repairs to both communal areas and your property and encourage residents to get involved with social events.

Scheme Support Officers are unable to provide nursing care and cannot provide services such as cooking and cleaning. They are also unable to handle residents’ money or any medication.

## **Daily call**

Scheme support officers will call you every morning to check how you are. This is an optional call which you can opt out of at any time or request if you don’t currently have it.

## **Lifeline**

All properties associated with our schemes benefit from having Lifeline installed. This is a pullcord which can be pulled in cases of emergency such as if you are feeling very unwell. The call will go through to the Scheme Support Officer if they are on site or Central Control if the Scheme Support Officer is off site.  You will be able to speak with the person/officer and they can establish what is happening. Central Control can alert the Scheme Support Officer, Out of Hours Officer, or the emergency services as required.

## **Security**

Each Scheme’s main entrance is fitted with a door entry system. Visitors would need to call through the system to gain access to the building by pressing the tenant’s door number. If there was no answer, they would either be spoken to by the Scheme Support Officer if they were on site, or Central Control would answer the call.

## **Communal Facilities**

The schemes benefit from communal facilities such as lounges, kitchen areas, and gardens. These areas should be respected and are for everyone’s use. They can be used to host activities such as light exercise classes and other classes which can be arranged by tenant’s groups or with the Resident Engagement Team.

The schemes also have communal laundry rooms with several washing machines and tumble dryers for resident use. You must ensure that you follow the instructions for the machines and report any faults or issues as soon as they arise to the Scheme Support Officer.

## **Visitors**

You are entitled to invite visitors to your property within the scheme. They must sign the visitors book on entry and when they leave. You and your visitors should be mindful of others living in the scheme and should not cause any nuisance or annoyance to others including anti-social behaviour. If visitors’ behaviour is deemed unacceptable, they may be asked to leave. Visitors are not allowed to stay in your property overnight (there is a guest room available in most schemes).

## **Guest Rooms**

Some of the schemes have a guest room available at a small cost per night. To book the guest room speak with your Scheme Support Officer.

# **Estate Services**

Medway Council works in partnership with Norse to deliver your communal cleaning service.

If you pay a service charge which includes caretaking you will receive a service from the estate wardens who carry out a range of duties in communal areas including:

* cleaning areas where bins are stored.
* daily health and safety checks at larger sites and regular checks at smaller blocks.
* reporting communal repairs.
* cleaning of communal entrance areas, stairways, and handrails (this does not include the landing or walkway area directly outside of the property).

If you live in a block of flats other duties may include:

* Checking door entry systems and lighting and reporting any faults.
* Checking rubbish chutes for blockages and bin areas for overflowing rubbish.

## **Helpdesk**

The managed helpdesk service which operates 24/7, co-ordinates requests, orders, complaints, and queries. You can contact the customer service operators by phone or email,

Phone: 0845 8500 319

Email: [norse.helpdesk@ncsgrp.co.uk](mailto:norse.helpdesk@ncsgrp.co.uk)

When should I call the helpdesk?

The helpdesk should be the first port of call to:

* Raise cleaning issues.
* Log specific requests in regard to any services which Norse provide.
* Record service/staff compliments and complaints
* Ask any questions regarding any service provision.

## **Estate Inspections**

An estate inspection is an inspection of the exterior and communal parts, facilities and grounds of a Medway Council housing estate or road that has 10 or more Council properties on. We will be marking the estate on how well it has performed compared to our estate standard. To view more information about estate inspections and our estate standard you can visit [our estate inspections page.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200152/council_housing/564/estate_services/2)

## **Grounds Maintenance.**

Housing Services are included in Medway Council’s corporate contract, the company delivering this service are Norse. The team will cut Housing Services’ communal grassed areas and open frontages on a three / four weekly cycle. This does not include tenants own private gardens.

Hard surface areas will be weed sprayed three times a year and hedges and shrub beds are cut back in the Autumn and Winter period, with pruning carried out late spring or early summer*.*

## **Trees**

Trees on communal Housing Services land are inspected by the Tree Officer at Norse with works prioritised on a health and safety basis. Reports are generated with recommended works and sent to Housing Services to agree. Norse contractors carry out works that are authorised by Housing Services. Some Trees are protected and carry a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on them, Norse must apply (on Housing Services behalf) to Medway Council’s Planning department to seek approval for any works to be carried out on a tree with a TPO.

## **Bulky Waste and Fly-tipping**

If you need to dispose of large items of furniture you will need to book a slot at the local Household Rubbish and Recycling Centre (HWRC) or book a large or bulky waste collection through Medway Council. Alternatively, you could use a licensed waste carrier, but you must ensure they are licensed to remove the items.

[Book a Household Waste and Recycling Centre Slot.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200132/waste_and_recycling/1123/book_a_vehicle_into_a_household_waste_and_recycling_centre_hwrc)

[Book a bulky waste collection.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200132/waste_and_recycling/71/book_a_large_or_bulky_item_collection)

From April 1 2023 to March 2024 each household will receive one free collection which are booked on a first come, first served basis.

You must not store large or bulky items in your gardens or communal areas.

Fly-tipping is rubbish and waste items that have been dumped on a greenspace, road, or pathway. Fly-tipping is a criminal offence. If you wish to report fly-tipping in a communal area or the area surrounding your property, please contact your Housing Officer by phone or email using the contact details at the start of the handbook.

If you spot fly-tipping in other areas whilst out, make a note of the location/road name and [report here.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200176/report_a_problem/394/report_fly-tipping)

# **Resident Engagement**

Medway Council Housing Services aim to provide resident engagement that caters for everyone, so that every tenant can participate and have a role in decision making, if they wish to. This will be achieved by providing different ways to engage, with different levels of engagement available to suit the time and commitment you are able to give.

## **Community Champions**

A community champion is someone who represents their local community and is happy to undertake occasional surveys to help us understand our service performance. They will also be happy to be notified about local Housing Services events in their area and help us promote events amongst their neighbours.

## **Resident’s Scrutiny Panel**

For Community Champions who may wish to be more involved. The panel plays an active role in the development of services and events for residents. The board meets quarterly with some additional workshops and meetings. The purpose of the board is to hold what Housing Services do to account. This includes;

* Reviewing performance data
* Scrutinising survey feedback and data
* Providing scrutiny and challenge on the improvement plans for services to residents.

## **Contract Monitoring Groups / Homes for Independent Living Group**

There is an opportunity for up to 2 residents to attend review meetings for our gas and repairs service. These meetings take place monthly or bi-monthly. There is also an opportunity for 2 residents who receive estate services from Medway Norse to attend Estate Management Review meetings which take place bi-monthly.

Our Homes for Independent Living schemes are also able to send representatives to the quarterly Homes for Independent Living Board meeting to discuss issues and concerns within the schemes as well as what is working well.

## **Community Engagement Events**

Throughout the year, Housing Services have a series of surgeries, events and activities which provide an opportunity to engage with residents. Our events will be published on our events page on the [Medway Council Housing Website.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/housing)

## **Contact us.**

The best way to contact the team regarding getting involved is to email[Tenant Participation](mailto:tenant.participation@medway.gov.uk)

# **Tenant commitments**

We have been working with our Resident Scrutiny Panel to design our new customer commitments to make sure we provide the best service for you, your home, and your community.

Our tenant commitments are broken down into 5 parts.

## **You**

**Respect -** Our officers will treat you and your family with respect, being polite and courteous.

**Communication**- We will communicate with you regularly and make sure communication is as easy as possible.

**Accessibility** - We will continue to make our services as accessible as possible, working with residents to identify and remove barriers.

**Support -**We will support you to manage your home and money.

## **Your home**

**Providing a competent workforce -** We'll make sure our officers and contractors are well trained.

**Easy to identify**- All our staff or staff working on our behalf will show ID.

**Sharing our performance -**We'll show residents how we are performing with repairs and compliance.

**Reacting to your concerns** - Someone will visit your property if you report concerns such as damp and mould in your property.

**Checking you are happy** - We will make sure you're happy with any work that is done in your home, ask for feedback, and use this to improve our services going forward.

## **Your community**

**Investment in your community** - Our officers will visit estates regularly to make sure they are well kept, and issues are identified. Our Estate Wardens from Norse will work to keep our estates clean and well maintained.

**Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) App** - Those reporting anti-social behaviour have access to an app to report ASB at any time.

**Staff Awareness** - We'll make sure our staff are trained and aware of the latest best practice and guidance.

## **Your say**

**Clear complaints process** - We'll make it easy for you to make a complaint if things go wrong.

**Engagement** - We'll make sure there are many ways to get involved including surveys, events, or our scrutiny panel.

**Influencing** - We'll provide opportunities to have a say in how our services are run.

**Publish and act on Tenant Satisfaction Measures** - We'll publish our survey results and details of how we responded to them.

## **Your commitment to us**

**Respect** - We ask that you treat our officers with respect.

**Speak up**- Let us know if you are having trouble with money, repairs, or something else as soon as possible so we can help and support you.

**Allow us access** - This allows us to carry out safety inspections, repairs, and install improvements.

**Pay your rent** - This allows us to fulfil our commitments to you.

## **Performance Information**

We collect and analyse our performance information across a range of services we provide. This allows us to identify areas that are working well or areas where improvements may be required.

We share our performance data with our Resident Scrutiny Panel who review it and give us feedback on areas they believe we could make improvements. We also publish our [performance information.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200589/housing_performance)

# **Comments, Complaints and Suggestions**

If you have had a good customer service experience, we would like to hear from you. Your feedback helps us discover what is working well and to also celebrate our hard-working staff. However, there may be times when you feel unhappy with the service you have received and wish to complain.

For compliments and complaints, you can contact us by the following methods.

Email: [customer.relations@medway.gov.uk](mailto:customer.relations@medway.gov.uk)

Phone: 01634 333333

Write to: Customer Relations, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR.

You can also use our online form by visiting the [Medway Council Website.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/)

## **Complaints process**

Stage 1: The team that have provided the service will review your complaint. They will aim to resolve your complaint as soon as possible and always within 10 days.

Stage 2: If you are unhappy with the response to your stage 1 complaint, you may take the complaint further. This will require more detailed investigation and we aim to resolve these complaints within 15 days.

As part of the process, we will:

* Establish the full circumstances of your complaint.
* Make arrangements for you to discuss the problem with us.
* Identify any learning opportunities or ways to prevent the issue occurring.

If you are still unhappy after completing both stages of our complaints process, you can contact [The Housing Ombudsman Service](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/)