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Re-mobilising our services

Dave Richmond, Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Housing, discusses the service's recovery.



As the lockdown is starting to ease, we are working to re-mobilise our services in accordance with government guidance relating to Coronavirus. During the pandemic we have been able to maintain our essential services, all be it at a scaled back level and with many of our staff working from home to support you.

Our immediate response during the crisis was to establish a dedicated phone line and three hubs #HullHelpline which we operated alongside partners in the voluntary sector. From the hubs, we responded to residents' requests for help, mainly from people who were shielding or socially isolated or didn't have family or neighbours who could support them. I know a number of tenants volunteered their services. Their assistance was invaluable, and I would like to offer my thanks to all of you who gave your time to support your local community. Further on in this newsletter is a list of some of the many achievements delivered by the hubs' teams.

Repairs and maintenance

Throughout the lockdown we have dealt with emergency repairs and the annual gas servicing; none urgent requests were put on hold. As we aim to establish a new "normal" way of working, our priority continues to be putting safety first for you, your household, our employees and our contractors when working in and around your home. No work will be carried out in any household which is isolating or where someone is being shielded, unless the problem itself poses a health, safety or security risk.

Emergency repairs continue to be our main focus. Requests for these should be made via the call centre on 01482 300 300. You will be asked questions about the fault or repair to establish if it is an emergency and safe for us to attend.

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Top tips

One of Hull's City Plan ambitions is to help people "make their money go further." In this issue of Hull Housing News, we've teamed up with Hull Warm Homes to offer you a few tips on energy efficiency which will help you save on your gas and electricity costs. See the bubbles on the inside pages.



Chat with the Chair

I'm writing this on a glorious sunny day when we would normally be thinking of days out, BBQs with friends and family, and similar summer activities.

But, this summer there is only one show in town - staying safe from Coronavirus. What a game changer it is!

Looking on the bright side, I do think the crisis has led to a new community spirit. I don't

just mean the clapping for NHS and carers, but people seem more willing to look out for their neighbours, volunteering to help out with deliveries and random acts of kindness for each other. In this context we can't ignore the work of the council's hubs and the many, many volunteers who have been on hand to help our vulnerable residents who most need help.

As I have said the impact of the virus is a game changer. We don't know when it will be over or what the new normal will be. Inevitably, it will

change the way we work as a tenants' organisation and we are already looking at how we go forward engaging with the Neighbourhoods and Housing Service and ensuring that Hull tenants' voices continue to be heard.

Finally stay safe and keep well, and I look forward to seeing many of you when the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Nev Allison
Chair of the Tenants' Forum

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As you can imagine, we have a backlog of non-urgent repairs where work was either started before the lockdown or has been reported since and put on hold. We have already been in touch with a number of tenants to arrange appointments in order of priority. We have also started to take new requests for non-urgent repairs with appointments for the actual works to be undertaken starting from 13 July 2020.

Access to buildings

In line with government guidance and advice, we are carrying out Health and Safety Assessments for all our public buildings, including the Wilson Centre and local housing offices. New procedures will be put in place to create a safe environment against the virus. We will announce when these buildings will re-open to the public so keep checking the council's website and Twitter and Facebook feeds. In the meantime, we are encouraging people to use the council's online services for things such as rent payments and checking rent accounts, reporting and tracking repairs to reduce the need for people to visit the offices, especially while safe social distancing remains in place. You can set up an online account at hull.gov.uk.

Homesearch

Another service which is back up and running is Homesearch. People can now start bidding on homes in the usual way.

The past weeks and months have indeed been extraordinary times. Never before have we experienced a global health crisis which is bringing significant changes to all aspects of our daily lives. The situation with Covid-19 changes daily. Please keep an eye on the council's website for the latest information.

Finally, can I stress the government's message at this critical time:

STAY ALERT. CONTROL THE VIRUS. SAVE LIVES

Voice of Tenants

Worried about paying your rent?

The Coronavirus outbreak is a worrying time and is affecting many aspects of our daily lives. The council is committed to supporting its tenants at this difficult time which is why we introduced our Covid-19 Council House Guarantee for tenants who have had a loss of income due to the pandemic.

The guarantee means that no court possession proceedings for rent arrears will take place until after 23 August 2020. However, this does not mean that tenants do not need to pay their rent. It is vitally important to pay your rent in order to prevent legal action at a later date. Our officers are there to help and so if you are struggling or worried about paying your rent and managing your household bills, it is important to get in touch with us as soon as possible so that we can understand your situation and provide you with the appropriate advice and support.

Hull City Council tenant?

Income affected by COVID-19?
Struggling to pay your rent?
We are here to support you.

Call us on **01482 300 300**
 or contact us at **hullocc.gov.uk**
 to see how we can help you.

Hull City Council

RENT FIRST

You can contact us on 01482 300 300 and online via the council website hullocc.gov.uk

Pay by Direct Debit

There has never been a better time to pay your rent by Direct Debit.

During the pandemic many shops and businesses have only accepted card payments and a likely legacy of the virus is that we will become an increasingly cashless society. Also, the virus has meant that some tenants have not been able to pay their rent in their preferred way either because they are staying at home or due to the temporary closure of our Customer Service Centres/Information Points.

The easiest and hassle free way to pay is to set up a Direct Debit, this way you have the peace of mind that your rent is always paid in full and on time.

Other ways you can still pay your rent are:

- online at hull.gov.uk
- telephone on 01482 300 300
- standing order
- bank transfer
- swipe card at Paypoint outlets which remain open.

Top tips on energy saving
 Having a shower generally uses just two fifths of the water for a bath

Shared tenancies for young people

Young people face numerous challenges in trying to find suitable accommodation.

Those moving from the care system can find it particularly difficult so it is important that they get support at this important time when they are moving to live independently. Hull City Council is a pioneering local authority, having introduced shared tenancies for the under 35s and support towards independent living.

Roving reporters Darren Milner and Chris Rogers met Alex Morizzo and Ardahan Mohammad from Neighbourhoods and Housing Service's Shared Tenancies team to find out more about the initiative.

What is a shared tenancy?

Basically it's a flat share. Each young person is allocated their own room, with a lockable door, in a fully furnished flat and they share the kitchen sitting room and bathroom facilities.

It is specifically for young people aged between 16 and 35 and includes support to help them move to their own independent tenancy. To be eligible for a shared tenancy the young person will be at risk of homelessness – for example: leaving the care system, family breakdown, unaccompanied asylum seeking children – and have a Hull connection. However, ideally any young person aged 18+ who is at risk of homelessness can apply for a shared tenancy.

How do you choose where the young people will live?

We work with the young person alongside the Children and Young People's Targeted Youth Support Team. During an initial interview, we will chat to the young person and get him/her to complete a questionnaire to get an insight as to his/her interests, what type of support does he/she need. For example, we discuss where the young person's social network is located because there's no point putting someone miles away from friends and family.



The young person may have his/her own reasons for not wanting to live in a particular area.

How do you choose the properties?

In recent years, the larger three bedroom flats have become unpopular and therefore hard to let, largely due to the "Bedroom Tax." All of our 28 properties fall into this category and we currently have the capacity for 62 young people.

How do you support the tenants?

We have a weekly house meeting which we and the residents attend. Any grizzles and gripes, such as doing the washing up/cleaning or similar, are aired. On an individual level we can advise and arrange life skills coaching, help with budgeting and other elements that assist independent living.

Are shared tenancies successful?

Yes. Since we began the project two years ago more than three quarters of our residents in shared tenancies have gone on to live independently and managed to sustain a tenancy.

Among the tenants themselves, in a recent satisfaction survey, they were unanimous in awarding the top mark of five to indicate that they were very happy living in a shared tenancy. Some respondents went on to say how much they had gained in confidence and in their emotional wellbeing.

Is the shared tenancies scheme unique to Hull?

Some housing associations offer shared tenancy facilities but Hull is the first local authority housing provider to offer such a scheme.

Voice of Tenants

Service improvements

As you know, we are always working to improve our services. During July we will be carrying out technical improvements to our database which are essential to improve online services in the future. The work will be done at weekends to keep any disruption to a minimum.

Top tips on energy saving

LED light bulbs use less energy and last much longer than ordinary bulbs

Paying for your TV licence

The free TV licence for the over 75s is changing.

Currently everyone over 75 gets one, but from August only people aged over 75 who receive pension credit will get a free licence. The change was supposed to happen in June, but due to Coronavirus it has been delayed until August. Once the concession is granted, everyone who lives in the household, regardless of age, will be covered by the free licence.

If you or your partner is over 75 and receiving Pension Credit you can apply for your free licence at www.tvlicensing.co.uk

When you apply for your TV licence you will need the following information:

- your date of birth
- national insurance number
- name and address including postcode
- current TV licence number.



Paying for your TV licence.

A colour TV licence costs £157.50 a year, but you don't have to pay for it all at once. You can spread the costs over a year with payment plans such as a monthly direct debit. You can even pay weekly, fortnightly or monthly with a TV payment card. TV licensing will be in touch with people who are affected by this change.

SPAM text messages

Are you fed up with junk messages clogging up your mobile phone? Don't get stressed – just forward them to 7726 – the numbers that spell SPAM on a traditional phone keypad. This will help the operator of your network to track down marketing cheats. If you are with Vodafone, send to 87726. There is no charge for this service.

Top tips on energy saving
Unplug your phone charger from the socket when your phone is fully charged

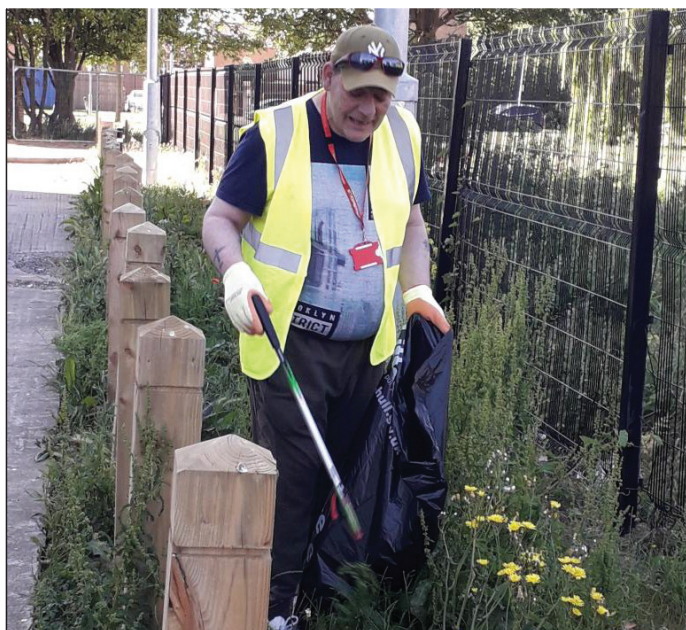
A helping hand

Thankfully, the majority of residents have been able to call on family and friends for help during these challenging times. For people without this type of assistance and are self-isolating or shielding, the council, our partners and voluntary organisations have been on hand to help.

Together with Humberside Police, Public Health, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service, KWL and HCAL, as well as staff from different parts of the council, we set up #Hullhelpline. This is a dedicated phone line supporting three hubs set up across the city. From these hubs we have co-ordinated a citywide response with existing and new volunteers, who have the relevant training and experience to help those residents who need it most.

The number of volunteers has been amazing and shown Hull's community spirit at its very best. The North Bank Forum and people from more than 40 voluntary and community organisations have been involved, including volunteers from local churches, Fairshare, foodbanks, Citizens Advice, Age Concern and Absolutely Cultured.

Here is a snapshot of the many and varied ways we've been working to prevent the spread of the virus and offering a helping hand via the hubs.



Pete Doncaster is one of a number of members of the Great Thornton Street Tenants' and Residents' Association who are regular litter pickers making sure the estate is kept clean and tidy.



TP officers Carl and Sherilee swapped their day jobs to check on the city's vulnerable residents to see if they needed help with such things as shopping, collecting medication or just needing someone to talk to.



Keeping our tenants safe is of the utmost importance to the council, and as your landlord we have a legal duty to carry out an annual gas safety inspection at your home.

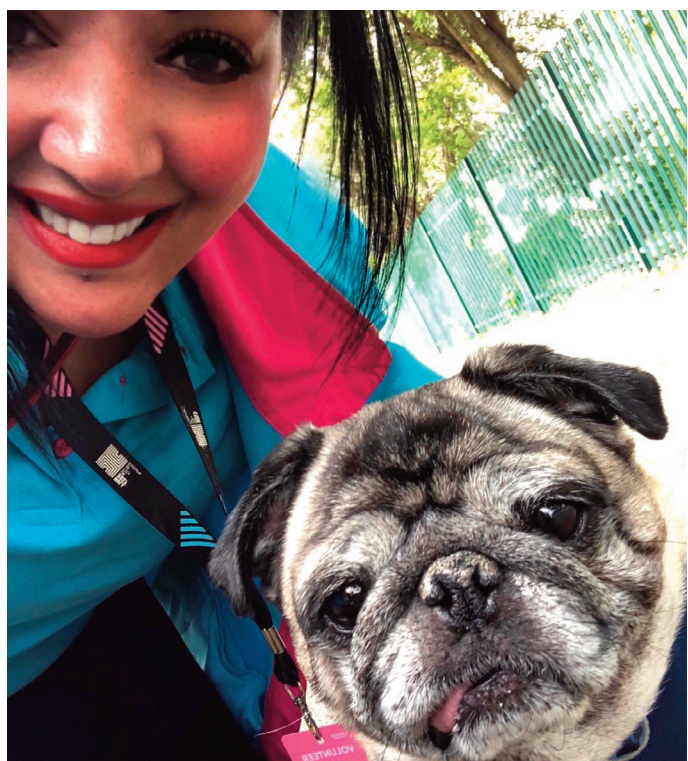
During the lockdown, unless someone in the household is self-isolating or being shielded, we have continued these inspections which have been warmly welcomed by our tenants.

Top tips on energy saving
Put lids on saucepans to reduce cooking times and condensation

Voice of Tenants



Did someone call Ghost Busters? People living in high rise flats and sheltered accommodation were considered a high risk for catching the virus because they all use the same entrance, same lifts and same communal spaces. The Housing Facilities Officers, dressed in full PPE, spray these areas with disinfectant regularly in addition to their usual stringent cleaning routine.



Meet Sita and Sandy the pug. Our pets are much loved companions, especially in times like these; but Sandy's elderly owner is self-isolating and can't take Sandy out for her usual walk. He now relies on volunteer Sita for exercise. Sandy is one of 23 dogs currently being walked by hub volunteers.



Charterhouse Community Tenants' and Residents' Association have encouraged children to try gardening as their daily exercise and they are learning about growing their own produce.

Calls to the hubs

An outbound calling team was established to contact residents identified as vulnerable by the council or NHS and therefore may need help. Currently the team has made more than 22,500 calls.

Requests for help and support from the hubs were very wide ranging. The most frequent were for food supplies and help with shopping or collecting medication. People worried about money too and the economic uncertainties associated with the pandemic, so colleagues from Citizens Advice were available to advise on money and payment of bills. Some people just needed a friendly voice to talk to so "Chatty Hull", the city's befriender service made sure they received a regular phone call to help relieve their isolation.

By mid-June, more than 6,600 households had been helped with some 9,100 different requests, some of which were repeated multiple times such as collecting prescriptions.

As the lock down eases, the hubs are continuing to operate with reduced weekend opening hours and we will wind down and close the hubs as the lockdown lifts. Residents who need support should register through an online form at hull.gov.uk or by calling 01482 300 307.

Looking out for our children

The Coronavirus pandemic has brought many changes to all of our lives. Schools, youth centres, leisure centres and sports clubs have closed. With lockdown restrictions in place, these locations which are usually a place of refuge means that sadly, home can become a more dangerous place than ever for some children.

As a council we want to make sure that no child in our city is suffering. We have safeguarding hubs and procedures in place. If you see any one or more of the signs

below, please share your concerns:

- aggression, repeated shouting
- hearing hitting or things being broken
- children crying for long periods
- young children left on their own
- children looking dirty, not changing their clothes
- children looking withdrawn or anxious.

You can do so by calling the council's call centre on 01482 300 300 or report it online: hull.gov.uk/worried

All information received will be dealt with promptly and in complete confidence.

Top tips on energy saving
Turning the tap off when you clean your teeth can save around five litres of water a day



TENANT FORUM MEETINGS SUSPENDED

Lockdown has presented everyone, including tenant participation forums, with many varied and unanticipated challenges. As soon as lockdown began we suspended meetings of our Tenants' Forum and other working groups which involved people meeting in close proximity to each other.

There is no quick fix to the Coronavirus outbreak, and even though lockdown restrictions are starting to ease, it will be a long time until we can think about meeting together as a group. We are therefore looking at alternative ways, such as online and activities where we can ensure social distancing to help effective tenant participation in the housing service, and will be consulting with you about how we take it forwards.

How would you like to engage with us?

As we explore new ways of communicating with you, we'd like to know your preferred method. What's best for you – email, Twitter, Facebook, letter? You can let us know by:

Email: tenant.resident@hullcc.gov.uk

Twitter: @HCCTPT

Facebook: Hull City Council Housing

Letter: Tenant Participation Team,
The Guildhall, Alfred Gelder Street,
Hull HU1 2AA

This document can be made available in other formats (large print, audio, digital copy, or Braille) and different languages. Call (01482) 300 300.

We are looking for new ways to engage with tenants in a changed world, and we would appreciate your views, contact us or follow Hull Housing on:



www.facebook.com/hulltp
www.facebook.com/hullcitycouncilhousing



@HCCTPT
@Hullccnews

Email:
tenant.resident@hullcc.gov.uk